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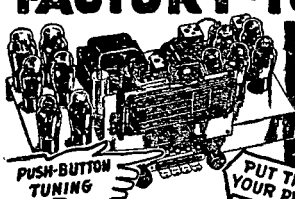

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Dr. Kildare's Crisis

By MAX BRAND

Author of "Dr. Kildare Goes Home," "Calling Dr. Kildare," etc.

So you're a diagnostician, Jimmy Kildare? All right: here's a man burning up with a plan to save the world, and he comes to you for help. And you know there's something dreadfully wrong with him—something you can't put your finger on. Think fast, Kildare; for whatever you decide means suffering!

CHAPTER I

MAN ON FIRE

KILDARE came out of the operating room trundling Gillespie's wheel-chair and looking straight ahead to avoid some of the compliments; but he had to pause when old, great Dr. Ackers said: "Good work, doctor. A fine pair of hands. Eleven minutes and twenty seconds from the first incision to the last stitch. We minimize shock, with speed like that. . . . And that was a bad kidney to get out. . . . I could use these hands, any day you're through with them, Gillespie."

Gillespie drew together the formidable white brush of his eyebrows: "Maybe you can have them damned soon, Ackers. . . . Get those useful hands off my chair, Kildare. They're too fine to be used like a nursemaid. You've taken plenty of my time, but I won't have you taking my exercise, also."

He wheeled himself down the corridor with Kildare walking silently beside him.

"Speed, speed!" snorted Gillespie. "No place to get to, and faster ways of getting there. That's the Twentieth Century, and be damned! And an old fool like Ackers praising it!"

"Was I too fast, sir?" asked Kildare.

"You know damned well you were too fast," said the old man. "What were you trying to do? Show off?"

There was a bit of silence.

"Well?" insisted Gillespie.

"Yes, sir. I was showing off—a little."

"Leave speed for typists and airplanes; your job is to handle human lives."

"Yes, sir. But I seemed to see my way right through that operation and—"

"Hold out your hand. Ha! Still a tremor in it, eh? Did you think you were crocheting, or what? . . . Did you read that book on the lymph glands last night? What's the name of it?"

They were in the elevator, descending.

"Winslow and Parker wrote it, sir," said Kildare.

"Well, did you read it last night?"

"No, sir."

The elevator man's cheeks were swelling. Kildare, even from behind, knew the width of the grin on that face.

"No, sir, you didn't read it, eh? Wasn't time, I suppose?"

"There was an interesting pneumonia in Ward B, sir. I spent most of the night there."

"Damn the interesting pneumonia. Nothing should interest you except what I tell you to do. You know that!"

"Yes, sir."

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Lamont paused only a moment, to look searchingly at Mary and Kildare. Both were intent, fascinated

"We've got to use our time the way misers use money. There mustn't be any waste. . . . What type was that pneumonia?"

"Thirty-one, sir."

"Ah, was it? Complications?"

"A deep abdominal infection, sir."

"Very pretty! Why didn't you call me?"

"You were sleeping, sir."

"I wasn't. Had my eyes closed to rest them, that was all. I try not to waste my nights sleeping, Kildare. What made you think I was sleeping?"

"Your snoring, sir."

"I wasn't snoring. I never snore. I may have been clearing my throat. . . . What did you do with the Type Thirty-one?"

THEY had left the elevator and were rolling into Gillespie's office. Kildare began: "I used an injection of—"

"That's one of the manias today," said Gillespie. "Injections—injections—injections! How was the patient this morning?"

"All danger is gone now, sir, I believe."

"Good boy!" said Gillespie. "Damn the books and the theorists. Cures are what we want. What are you doing there?"

Kildare had taken from a small box two pills, which he now offered to Gillespie.

"I believe it's time for these, sir."

"Pills—pills—pills!" roared Gillespie. "You'll never make a doctor if you keep using pills. They're like sleep: chiefly a habit. The curse of the American people is the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. A hundred and thirty million people are putting pills in their mouths three times a day. How the devil can they amount to anything?

"There's no time left for continuity of thought or effort. A hundred and thirty million of the richest, healthiest people that ever lived, watching the clock and putting pills in their mouths. Take those damned things away!"

Kildare patiently kept offering them with a small glass of water.

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"It's time for these, sir," he insisted.

"How do I look to you, Jimmy?" asked the old man, anxiously.

"Not very badly, sir. How do you feel? Is the pain much worse this morning?"

"Questions — questions — questions!" shouted Gillespie. "How are you going to make a diagnostician unless you start using your eyes? What difference does it make how people feel? A hundred million hours a day are wasted in this nation by people asking themselves how they feel. A mere habit and luxury of the mind.

"The question is: How *are* they, not how do they think they feel. Self-pity is ruining the white race, and you stand there and ask me how I feel! . . . I'm not so damned well, if you come right down to it, Jimmy."

"You're a little worn, sir."

"What should I do? Relax?"

"No, sir, you have to keep going."

"Right! But what *should* I do?"

"Take these pills, sir, if you please."

Gillespie, glowering, clapped them into his mouth and swallowed some water. He shuddered strongly.

"Superstition — witchcraft — good luck charms—they're all in a class with pills and pill-taking," he declared.

MARY LAMONT came in. The sun aslant through the window flashed on her white uniform as she went to Gillespie's desk and placed on it a small file of papers.

"Don't come in here without knocking, What's-your-name," called Gillespie. "Who told you to come into this room without knocking?"

"You did, doctor," said the girl.

There was such young beauty in her that she always seemed to have been smiling and just about to smile again.

"I don't believe it," said Gillespie. "And why do you have so much starch in your uniform? So it will rustle? So people will know you're about? It makes you take up too much room. Don't try to take a place in the sun, around here."

"No, doctor," she said.

"Nurses are not human beings. They're merely pairs of hands performing services —usually badly. And don't roll your eyes at Kildare, either. He only pretends about you. He doesn't take you seriously. For him, you're only a bit of simple diversion. A man has to have a little diversion, doesn't he?"

"Yes, doctor," she said.

"The damned young idiot has been trying for speed records in the operating room, Mary," said Gillespie. "There's still a tremor in him. Take his hand and see. There! But wipe that fool look off your face. You're not seeing his immortal soul. Doctor's don't have souls. But here's a young jackass who stays up all night nursing pneumonia patients and exhausting himself. What shall I do with him?"

"I might suggest a little diversion, sir."

"You might suggest— What the devil are you talking about? He sees too *much* of you. Packmules lead an easier life than a man in love; their burdens have to be carried only part of the day; but this young fool has Mary Lamont in every breath he draws. . . . How many people in the waiting room?"

"Thirty-five, sir," said the girl.

"I'll start taking them at once, sir," said Kildare.

"You'll do nothing of the kind. Go into your office and lie down for an hour."

"But I have to write out a report on—"

"Damn the reports. Damn the writing. It might make a novelist out of you but it'll never make a doctor. Conover! Conover! Next patient, please!"

Kildare went into his adjoining office with the nurse behind him.

"He's been difficult? He's hurt you, Jimmy?" asked the girl.

"Gillespie? He never hurts me. But he's worse, Mary. He's failing fast. He's been dying all year. It isn't his body that the cancer's eating. It's his nerves; it's his soul. I've been watching the pain at work in his eyes and it makes me a little sick."

"I know," said Mary Lamont.

"He's a great man; and some day I've got to see him fall."

"I know," she repeated. "Poor Jimmy!

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I think he would have died months ago, except that he loves you, and he has to last long enough to teach you everything he knows."

"Everything?" Kildare laughed briefly.

"Is it true that you were up again, all last night?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Take some time off, Mary," said Kildare. "I've got to dig out some work now."

"You'd better rest, hadn't you? Hadn't you better do what Doctor Gillespie suggests?"

"I'll rest when he does."

"Jimmy! You know he doesn't sleep any more than a bird."

"I can stand it as well as he does. Lock the door when you go out. I'm not seeing anyone. Not a soul."

A KNOCK came at the door then—two quick taps, a pause, and three more. Mary frowned.

"That's Joe Weyman," she said. "Of course I'll tell him that you're not seeing anyone?"

"Joe? Of course I have to see him. He's an exception."

"Everybody who wants your time—everybody's an exception, except me," she said.

"Well— Let Joe come in," he answered.

She paused an instant to look at the youth in his face and the weary age around his eyes. All of his features would follow that pattern before very long. He was one of the few who must find their happiness in labor; they accept the curse of Adam as a blessing.

Certainly *she* was not one of the elect who reach pain always, and fame once in ten thousand instances. Already he was at his desk, breaking down a pile of charts and picking up a pen to assemble statistics.

She went to the door and opened it on the wide shoulders and the barbarous grin of Joe Weyman, the ambulance driver. The apes in the trees seemed nearer kin to Weyman than young Dr. Kildare, and yet he made a place in his heart for the burly fellow.

"The doctor is *very* busy, Joe," she said.

"Sure he is," said Weyman, "but I'm sick is why I wanta see him."

"Come in, Joe," said Kildare.

Weyman stepped inside. He looked from the doctor to the girl.

"He wants to see me alone," said Kildare, already smiling a welcome to the ambulance man.

"All right," sighed Mary, and went out, saying over her shoulder: "May I have a word with you later?"

"Yes. Later," said Kildare, as the door closed behind her.

"Not a little short with her, doc, are you?" asked Weyman.

"Short? With Mary? We understand each other," said Kildare.

"Sure," said Weyman. "But they do the understanding and we do the guessing, usually. . . . Doc, I'm kind of low. I wondered could you give me a pick-me-up."

"You've been hitting it pretty hard, Joe?"

"Hard? I hardly never hit it hard."

"You were at it last night?"

"How would you guess that?"

"It's not too hard. You've got the blear in your eye and the thickness in your upper lip. You've been hitting it hard for a couple of weeks."

"It's the job, Doc," said Weyman, slowly. "You sit still as a stone waiting for a call; and then all at once it comes and you've gotta make tracks. Somebody's dying, somewhere. You gotta be there sudden. You go on the jump; you pick up some mug; you jump him back to the hospital; and then you're sitting still as a stone again, waiting for things to happen. It kind of gets on your nerves."

"So you hit the hooch?"

"After hours, doc. Nobody never found nothing on my breath during hours. So I wondered if you'd give me a pick-me-up."

"No," said Kildare.

Weyman stared. He even moved a step closer, still staring, to make out that it really was Kildare who had made this strange response.

Kildare explained, carefully: "I've

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watched the way you've been driving, lately. You're depending on the siren to cut your way through the traffic. And you're going to smash up, Joe. Some day with rain on the street. You'll go like a light. A side-swipe, and you'll be out."

"Yeah. Maybe. But today—"

"I don't want you to feel any better. I want you to be as sick as a dog all day. It'll make you think until you realize that you've got to get out of this business. You've got to quit the ambulance job, Joe. Do some thinking about it today. Will you?"

"You mean that I get nothing?" said Weyman.

"Not a thing."

Weyman turned clumsily toward the door. When he reached it, he laughed suddenly and looked over his shoulder.

"What d'ya think, doc?" he asked. "I was almost sore at you!"

HE WENT out, and Kildare looked after him for a moment, glancing into his life and his future and seeing the dullness of the hospital life without the bright little eyes and the broad mug of Weyman to enliven it.

That picture faded into other things: long rows of white cots, and the whisper of padding feet in the corridors; loaded wheel stretchers passing soundlessly; the glimmer of test-tubes in the laboratory, and the voice of Gillespie at work in his inner ear, constantly.

He turned back to his work, which was to relate all the complicated points of a high stack of charts. It meant multiplying, dividing, adding, correlating constantly. As usual, the moment he was employed, time ceased.

The day was not for him a series of little compartments into which he closed his attention for a few moments at a time; it was the sweep of a river that carried him with it, blindly. It was what Gillespie called "the divine absorption." Without it, he would have been an excellent doctor with a keen gift for diagnosis; with it, he gave promise of becoming the great thing that Gillespie had in mind as his destiny.

He was lost in his work; the voice of the city died out of his ears; there was no sound from the hospital, for him; before his mind's eye there began to grow dimly the foresight and the insight into a solution of his problem, a solution that was founded upon assembled hundreds of temperatures, blood-pressures, nerve reactions, contracting pupils.

"Jimmy, when you think you may be free . . ." said the voice of Mary Lamont.

He withdrew only a step from the center of his dream.

"Don't bother me!" he said.

The door closed softly, a moment later.

"You've hurt her, this time," said Gillespie.

That voice, as always, rallied him instantly from all of his preoccupation.

"How did you get in here?" he asked, turning bewildered toward his chief.

"How do you think?" asked Gillespie. "I kicked the door open and wheeled myself in, and cleared my throat a couple of times; but you were out wool-gathering, asleep at your post."

"I wasn't asleep," said Kildare.

"I used to be able to do it," said Gillespie, enviously. "When I was your age, I could lose myself in a medical problem for days at a time. But now I'm old and fidgety and all I can do is try to remember. I'm too old to learn. But one thing I know without thinking: a man can't talk to a young girl the way you spoke to Mary, just now."

Kildare stretched and yawned. His eyes sought the charts again.

"Don't be bored when *I'm* talking to you," roared Gillespie. "You think you own her because you're engaged to her? You think those eyes of hers don't see *other* men in the world?"

"Let her see them," said Kildare. "I haven't time to bother—and she knows it."

"Does she, eh? I'll tell you what she knows. That she won't speak to you again the whole long day."

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"Nonsense," said Kildare.

"You know better than I do, I suppose? I *saw* the way her head bent when she went out through that door. She's out there crying her eyes out, now. You're going to cut her out of your life, young Dr. Kildare; and when she's gone, where will you get another like her?"

Kildare yawned again, heartily.

"Not concerned, eh?" asked Gillespie.

"No, sir," said Kildare. "But I'd like to ask you about this second batch of charts on the—"

"Damn the charts. I'm talking about the happiness of your immortal soul—because the only soul in your damned life is going to be represented by that girl—and why do you think she left the room with her head bowed?"

"She was thinking of something she could do for me," said Kildare, indifferently.

"Of all the confounded, pig-headed, brass knuckled stupidity I've ever run into," said Gillespie. "Of all the damned flat-faced self-assurance . . ."

HERE the door opened on Mary, who came smiling in and placed a slide-rule beside Kildare.

"Do you know how to run this, Jimmy?" she asked.

"Why the devil didn't I think of a slide-rule before?" sighed Kildare.

"And that's all the thanks he gives her," groaned Gillespie, and wheeled his chair suddenly out of the room. Kildare looked up at the girl.

"What are you waiting for, Mary?" he asked.

"Not for thanks," she said.

He smiled, faintly, and touched her with a quick gesture. He was beginning to be fully aware of her, something he rarely permitted himself during the course of working hours because once his mind set toward her it remained on that course for a long time.

"You have news of some sort," he said.

"What makes you think so?"

"You've got lights in your eyes. Like fish in a creek. What's it all about?"

"Douglas is in New York?"

"What Douglas?"

"My brother. I've just seen him. Jimmy, he's a new man. He's tremendous. He has a great idea. He has the most glorious idea. That's what's in my eyes—what he's been telling me."

"Right up on his toes?"

"Yes, like a wildcat."

"I thought your brother Douglas was a slow fellow, a methodical chap, a sort of a measuring worm crawling along through his economics classes, and all that."

"He was. But now he has an idea that sets him on fire. There's something you can do for him. Will you?"

"No," said Kildare.

"Jimmy!"

"I don't like people who get on fire, all at once. I don't like the ideas that light them up, either. Not usually."

"I'll tell him to come when he can," said Mary. "And you'll be simply dizzy when you hear him."

"What's he going to do? Save the country?" asked Kildare.

"How did you guess?" said she.

CHAPTER II

BRAVE NEW WORLD

LAMONT called at the hospital that afternoon and Mary brought him into Kildare's office. He was in his thirties, ten or twelve years older than Mary. He had gray hair, a pure and shining white around the temples, so that his gathered brows were doubly dark.

He had a starved body, inadequate to the bearing of burdens, and eyes from which the light had been burned out. There was no token of the man on fire whom she had described to Kildare. Mary was anxious about him.

"This horrible New York!" she said. "See what it's done to poor Douglas in a day. He was on his toes, yesterday; and now he's done in. What's wrong with him, Jimmy?"

Kildare looked at her again. She was

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dressed for the street and had on a pill-box hat that made her look as silly as a female hussar. She wore a string of thin beads that supported at her throat a pendant of deep blue lapis, threaded with golden veinings; and as she turned between Kildare and her brother the pendant swung excitedly back and forth.

"Young Doctor Kildare is the miracle man?" asked Douglas Lamont. "He can read our secrets at a glance? . . . I'll sit down a moment, if I may."

He slumped into a chair and dropped his head against the back of it.

"What *is* wrong with him?" Mary Lamont repeated.

"He's sleeping badly," said Kildare.

"I put in eight hours, last night," said Lamont, yawning.

"And woke up feeling as if you'd been climbing mountains all night?" asked Kildare.

Lamont was vaguely amused.

"These practical men; these practical scientists!" he said. He shook his head. Practical science was not important in his world, it seemed.

"Tell him really how you feel," insisted the girl.

"Shall I?" asked Lamont, yawning again.

His head dropped still farther back. He stared straight before him with a sudden relaxing of all the muscles of his face and his eyes were utterly emptied, like colored glass from which sparkling water has been poured. It was the perfect picture of a man who has gone to sleep while he talks; there was even the loosening of the mouth, and there was something else about the picture that Kildare felt but could not note down, for all his quick diagnostician's eye.

"You really ought to give him a pick-up of some sort," said Mary Lamont.

Her brother sat up and shrugged his shoulders. He seemed startled and thoroughly roused.

"No pick-ups; I'm not one for drugs," he said, briskly.

"But it won't hurt you; it won't be habit forming; it won't be really a drug at all; just a sort of bracer, Douglas," she urged.

"Nonsense," said Lamont. He took a quick, deep breath. "A man simply has to pull himself together, now and then. Make an effort of the will. That's all. I'm myself again, now. I had to father her for a few years," he explained to Kildare, "and now she thinks that it's her turn to mother me. . . . Shall we go along, Mary?"

"Why, have you forgotten everything?" she asked.

"Forgotten what?" snapped Lamont.

HE WAS entirely changed, alert, and ready. Limp linen is not more changed by starch than this man had been changed by a single effort of the will. The temper had been put back into the steel, it seemed.

"There was the introduction, you know," said Mary.

"I can't ask him to introduce something he doesn't know about," said Lamont. "Can you spare ten minutes, doctor?"

"I can," said Kildare.

"You keep watching me," said Lamont. "Is there something odd about me? Something medically curious?"

"Yes," said Kildare.

"What, please?"

"I don't know," said Kildare.

"Odd," said Lamont. "You see something, and you don't know what?"

"That's it," answered Kildare, gravely. "Forget about it."

"Gladly," said Lamont.

"You see, dear," Mary explained to her brother, "a diagnostician with a gift like Jimmy's only guesses, at first. . . . Jimmy, it isn't anything serious, is it?"

"I hope not," answered Kildare, with the vacant eyes of a man who searches a crowded memory.

"This is being a little too mysterious, isn't it?" asked Lamont.

"Hush!" cautioned the girl, lifting her hand to silence her brother and looking with frightened attention into the vacant eyes of Kildare. "Let him have a chance to think."

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"The fact is," said Lamont, "that my own health is pretty good. I have some bad dreams—like Hamlet. That's all. But let's drop the inquiry into my symptoms, doctor. Do you mind?"

Kildare returned slowly from his inward search.

"Not at all," he agreed.

But he kept on watching Douglas Lamont with a curious concentration which Mary had seen often before. She dreaded, now, what that narrowed vision might discover, almost as if a detective had been probing toward family secrets.

It seemed to her that a strain of conflict had been created between the two. There was something sharp, self-confident, irascible about Douglas which, she was sure, would arouse the antagonism of Jimmy Kildare.

She had hoped to make of them a single united force to accomplish her brother's purpose. So she looked anxiously back and forth from one to the other. The world of men and their preoccupations, not for the first time, seemed to her something fenced away behind a very high wall.

"May I talk?" asked Douglas Lamont briefly.

"Of course," said Kildare.

"Let's forget about ourselves and think of the whole nation," said Lamont. "The whole three million square miles. A few cities dotted down here and there—and tens of millions of wasted acres."

He paused, intent on Kildare.

"I'm seeing it," agreed Kildare.

"Now that you have the picture in mind, I want you to think of something else: the billions of hours of waste time, the leisure of our hundred and thirty millions. Spare hours that could fertilize the useless land."

"As the peasants do in Europe, you know," suggested Mary.

"You're going to teach people to like work?" asked Kildare, smiling a little.

"Hush, Jimmy!" the girl cautioned him. "It's really tremendous. Just listen and see!"

"Technology produces two things," said Douglas Lamont, "and these are cheap goods and leisure. But those leisure hours are the things that eat out the heart of the nation. Cocktail bars, silly radio entertainments, foolish movies, swing music eat up the leisure that ought to be a man's treasure.

"Our children grow up brainless because they grow up handless. Tempt them to use their hands and their minds will grow at the same time. They must learn to play and their play must make sense. The greatest game in the world is the building game. The greatest joy is to make things grow—anything: a house, a crop of vegetables.

"And half our children have concrete instead of soil underfoot. And the minds of half of our working men are decaying with too much leisure, or with the mechanical tending of mechanical machines. Are you listening, Jimmy?"

"No one could help listening."

For in fact it was not the words that impressed him so much as the passion in the voice of Lamont, and the vision in his eyes that already had foreseen a happy nation.

"THE automobile expands our cities," said Lamont, "but not far enough. It gives working men burdens, not opportunities. It gives him a foolish patch of lawn to cut on Sundays, and a back yard where he can throw tin cans, and pick them up again. The soil is not temptation to him; and we must *make* the soil the temptation.

"Now follow me. From the great cities not jolting subway cars, but streamlined underground trains slide the tens of thousands, the hundreds of thousands of working people at the end of the day—not into cramped little suburbs, where the houses rub shoulders and one crying child can keep twenty families awake, but out into the real country, sliding the crowds along at seventy miles an hour. And at the end of the line the worker finds not a town lot but a small farm. A three or four acre farm."

"A nation of small farmers?" asked Kildare."

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"You see, Jimmy?" demanded Mary Lamont, happily.

"I partly see and I partly hope," said Kildare. "But how will millions of workers learn to spend their leisure farming? Who will teach 'em, and how?"

"You see what they could do if they *were* taught?" asked Lamont.

"There's enough leisure in any family," agreed Kildare, "to make three or four acres bloom from end to end."

"Intensive cultivation," added Lamont. "There's no such thing as barren land in Italy because people work on every inch of the soil. Why, we'd have orchards with vegetables growing between the rows, and corn standing higher than your head, and potatoes, all the important vegetables as a matter of course, berry patches, alfalfa giving a couple or more heavy crops a year and fed to cows, and there would be sheep, goats, swine.

"An acre easily can feed one man; much more than feed one man if it's used properly. You can get three thousand pounds of wheat from one acre. You begin to see?"

"Millions of people growing most of their own food and getting healthy and happy while they do it?" asked Kildare.

"That's it. But think what happens in the beginning. Let's say we consider a man out of work, unlikely to find work again soon, and with a family on his hands."

Kildare sat forward.

"Oh, that's it," he said. "Let's hear about the unemployed."

Mary Lamont, instantly aware of the new attitude, smiled and nodded at him with approval. And yet from the first she had been assured and simply waiting for the magic of her brother to take effect upon Kildare.

Kildare added: "I suppose that's about the toughest thing there is in the world: a sick man, let's say, out of work and with a family on his hands. Relief administrations are not enough."

"You see that, do you?" snapped Lamont.

"Relief rots away the soul of a man, of course," said Kildare.

Lamont laughed; there was a bright excitement in him that did not fade.

"MY DEAR Jimmy, you're almost one of us," he said. "Let's take your sick man and his family. They are assigned to four acres, in the middle of which there is not a real home but the nucleus of one, something that will grow.

"The project offers the land and the house for no down payments; nothing will be asked for at least a year. There is also credit extended to the new man in the community center. There you find the store, the playhouse, the swimming pool and courts for games. It is not too far away for walking.

"In the community center there is the farm adviser, the mechanic-plumber, the electrician, the doctor, the carpenter—the few minds that are necessary to show this man how to use his spare time, how to employ his hands.

"He begins to plant his soil. He is told what crops will do best for marketing, what will best fill the family larder for the year. At the same time, he is shown how he can expand the nucleus of his home—how the single room gradually can be expanded into a comfortable house.

"There is a need for some experience in construction. So the sheds are built first, the sheds to hold wood, and hay for the animals, for there must be animals. It is part of the natural economy. He cannot afford to buy mature animals, but the newborn ones cost almost nothing.

"With the sheds built against the coming of winter he can turn his attention to the expansion of his house. The passion to create is in him, now. In three months, we discover, the most ignorant and handless slum dweller will begin to react to opportunities for expressing himself in a new physical environment."

"You've checked that sort of thing? You *know* how people respond?" asked Kildare.

"What have I been doing for years," said Lamont, "except examine the effects of

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reparation to the soil? But there never has been a scheme as large as mine, nothing that offered half so much real implementing of the idea.

"The beauty of it, you see, is the small scale on which it commences. The worker is not tempted to laziness by having comfort poured into his hands. Instead, a spur is stuck in his side; he sees security just ahead of him, if only he will make an effort toward it; and therefore he starts making the effort.

"His clumsiness does not shame him. Other men are going through the same phase. The whole community is aware of the novelty of its nature. It begins to take pride. The clever fellows are imitated by the dull ones. Stupid women become good cooks, watching the intelligent housekeepers.

"There will be no inertia, because there is no inertia in a new world, a frontier settlement; and it is a new frontier which we are creating. We are bringing the challenges of space and soil to the doors of the cities.

"And remember, again, the Kingdom of God is in the muscles; the work done by the hands informs the mind. These unemployed people, or day laborers, begin to awaken. They look up. Not toward wealth but toward culture.

"The greatest virtues, as thrift, cleanliness, industry, must grow among them because otherwise existence is impossible. As the small New England farms produced the strongest of our generations, so these little holdings will create another American race, rich in the strength of the soil."

LAMONT paused for only a moment, to look searchingly at Mary and Kildare. Seeing them intent, fascinated, he plunged on. "The shadow, the dirt, the noise of the city is taken from these people. They cannot help reaching up into the light.

"And at last even the unhappy necessities of technology, the brain-cramping needs of the machine, will not be able to destroy their spirits because every day the man and his family will be refreshed by the return to the soil.

"From charges on the state, they become tax-payers. Political machines cannot work effectively in such wide spaces. A decent political consciousness awakes and is schooled.

"In the end we may have a people tempted not by wealth but by the full, vigorous life that springs out of the soil. The idle hours in which every corruption enters the soul and breeds will be stripped away.

"There will be employment for every hand, and on such small holdings the work of every hand can be seen and appreciated. There will be in these people the secure content of filled barns and crowded larders; they will have the interest of barnyard animals; instead of dirty pennies and store candy and vacuous radio programs and the insipid bathos of the moving picture, the children will be filled with excitement by the most fascinating of all moving pictures—the growth from the soil.

"They cannot be indifferent to seeds their own hands have planted and watered and fertilized. Every inch of every acre will bloom and our country will return to the normal, true, strong way of life. Eyes will be sharpened, ears will be opened, and poetry will have a new birth!

"The communal consciousness develops into the national consciousness and these in turn cannot help but produce in the end the consciousness of a higher self."

CHAPTER III

THE SICK SALESMAN

WHEN he had ended, the thought still worked for a silent moment in the mind of Kildare while Lamont walked in continued excitement up and down the room. Mary could not stay in her chair.

"It must be heard by people who can do something about it," she said. "*You're* convinced, Jimmy, aren't you?"

Kildare nodded, remembering suddenly the relaxation, as of sudden sleep, which he had seen overwhelm Douglas Lamont.

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"I think it might work," he said, "with a man like your brother to drive it along and hypnotize any opposition. If he could last out the work until it's established . . ."

He considered the fragile body, the pale face of Lamont.

"Who *could* be opposed to us?" asked Lamont.

"Plenty of people," said Kildare. "Politicians who can't get a spoon into this bowl of soup. Newspapers who need something to laugh at. And all the reformers who have their own special panaceas to apply. Your plan is too simple to be convincing—unless you're on hand to do the talking."

"And who'll keep me from being on hand?" asked Lamont.

"You're not terribly strong, you know," said Kildare.

"I have strength for this, though," said Lamont. "I tell you, Jimmy, I could use myself up to the last ounce, and the final bit of me would still throw a light for the fools to see by. I have strength enough.

"I tell you, God wouldn't let me be consumed before I've put one sample, one pattern project on the map. I know a tract in Jersey where the land is cheap as dirt. It would be a reclamation project for both men and acres. Nothing lost. Everything gained."

"But he has to have money," said Mary Lamont, "and that's why I thought of you. You know Paul Messenger. He'd *have* to listen to anyone you send to him."

"That *would* be good," said Lamont. "I've heard of the Messenger millions."

"The trouble is," said Kildare, studying the starved body of Lamont again, "that I'm not an economist like you, Douglas. I can't pretend to be a sound critic of ideas like yours. And Messenger is a great-hearted man. He'd give money; he'd give blood for anything that seemed right. And if I introduce you—"

"I see how it is," broke in Lamont, coldly angry. "Let's waste no more time on it. Glad I've seen you, Jimmy. Shall we get along, Mary?"

"Don't be sour about it, please," said Kildare. "You see, I've happened to do a few things for Mr. Messenger that he considers important. He'd take a recommendation from me almost—well, almost as an order. And I can't pretend to be an expert in economics, so that—"

"Jimmy, Jimmy," exclaimed Mary, impatiently, "you're not an expert in economics but Douglas *is*. How could he possibly be wrong about this when he's given his whole life to the study of—"

"Don't argue, Mary," said Lamont. "There's more than one rich man in New York. I wouldn't have Jimmy talk against his conscience."

"I suppose it *is* right for me to telephone to Messenger," decided Kildare. He tried to drive away his own reluctance. In the Utopia which Lamont had sketched it was true that he had not been able to pick flaws; and yet the picture seemed a little too glowing to be true.

It was more than the scheme itself that troubled him. He could not drive from his mind the feeling that there was something pathologically wrong with this man, so wrong that he regretted the kinship with Mary.

Yet he found his hand reaching for the telephone. He could not resist the eye of the girl, bright with surprise at his delay.

HE GOT the switchboard operator at the Messenger offices, the assistant secretary, then the secretary himself. That important man said: "Impossible for Mr. Messenger to answer any calls just now. Give me your message, please."

"This is Kildare. Will you ask . . ."

"Ah, Dr. Kildare?" came the hasty answer. "I'll take a chance and put you through to him at once."

And then Paul Messenger's strong, deep voice was saying: "Hello, Jimmy. . . . How are you, my boy? Nancy was asking about you yesterday, but you never let me have news of you to pass on."

"I'm sorry to interrupt," said Kildare.

"You're never interrupting. Not a thing in the world for me to do while you're on the phone."

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"The fact is that there's a friend of mine—a Douglas Lamont—who wants to talk to you. I wondered if you could see him before very long?"

"An old friend of yours, Jimmy?"

Kildare winced, but he knew that the strong voice of Messenger could be heard all through the office. He had to answer: "A close friend of mine, as a matter of fact."

"Of course I'll see him," said Messenger. "A close friend of yours, eh? I'll—wait a minute—I'll make myself free to see him. Send him over if he can come now."

"That's kind of you," said Kildare.

"Not kind at all. Shall I tell Nancy that you're well?"

"In fine shape, sir."

"And that you're thinking of us now and then?"

"Of course."

"Goodbye, Jimmy. Give us an evening when you can."

". . . . That's decent of you," said Lamont, still half offended. But I'm afraid that you've been dragged into this. I don't want to hitch you to what you feel is a lost cause, you know."

"Nonsense, Douglas," said the girl. "Lost causes are the only ones that Jimmy likes."

"Kildare! Kildare!" roared Gillespie from the next room.

He waved at the two Lamonts and hurried to his chief.

OUT on the street, Mary Lamont was for a taxi; her brother insisted on a bus. "Extravagant," he said.

"But it's a special occasion," she urged. "And it'll give you more time with Mr. Messenger."

He grew solemn. He rarely was far from solemnity. "Expenditure on the unessentials—if we could save that, we'd be able to fatten all our poor and dress them warmly," he said. "We have to be conscious of the whole social pattern; and we have to serve it all the time, Mary. You play with the idea now and then but it ought to be with us constantly."

She smiled inwardly. There was no lightness about this good man. And in the old days he had been considered by many people a famous bore. How they would change their minds before long!

A thunderstorm rolled over Manhattan from the west. The rain slowed traffic; taxicabs thickened it like gruel in soup; the cross-town currents stalled between the great north-south avenues and started their horns in choruses of dissonance; but Douglas Lamont continued to talk, straining his voice so that other passengers in the bus became curiously aware of him.

With his starved hands he made gestures which cherished the future of the commonwealth and the common man. People glanced at him smiling, with a touch of contempt; but when they overheard even a phrase they became serious.

His eloquence, Mary decided, lay not so much in words as in a radiation of earnestness. She herself was on the verge of smiling continually, moved by affection, pride, and that pity which we feel for people who are given utterly to any great and selfless cause.

When they came to the great building in which Messenger kept offices she said: "I'll wait at the entrance for you, Douglas. Mr. Messenger is a big man, rather tense, goodhearted, but full of affairs. He loves Jimmy; he'll do anything for Jimmy; but all that he could do never would repay what Jimmy's done for him. However, I'd try to make your argument short, terribly short. You don't know how this New York pressure makes men cut their time into kindling wood."

He listened to her, two-thirds of his attention already flowing forward, away from her. Then, with a hasty gesture of farewell, he hurried forward to an express elevator.

He looked small and hopelessly fragile in the crowd of office workers who were leaving the building. He leaned against the stream of them as if against the weight of a wind storm. They went out, happy with the day's end, and he passed in, intent on their cause with a sacred concern.

Some day, she thought, his name would

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be so known and his face so familiar that all the unfortunate, all the downtrodden, all the unhappy people of the world would turn toward him as toward a light.

The elevator doors closed and he was gone from her sight. In the great hall of the building all sounds were subdued—the power-hum from the elevator shafts, the clicking of heels and the murmuring of voices—until the noise was like something in her own mind.

Through the crowd of hurrying office workers, mostly women, men moved singly or in small groups, at leisure that made them seemed more important.

These were the lords of the land, the men of affairs, the owners and controllers. It was they who were almost bound to smile at schemes such as that of Douglas Lamont; and Paul Messenger was one of these. When she remembered this, her heart sank.

SHE went back to the street and stood against the concrete wall. The rain came in flurries and sudden strong gusts on the wind but she preferred the open because hope for her brother revived in that stirring air.

It was between day and night. The lower stories of buildings already were lighted; the upper reaches still had enough sunlight. She had an impression of the city as of an immense ship, voyaging and insecure.

After twenty minutes, she watched the entrance of the building carefully. At the end of half an hour, Douglas still had not appeared. She wondered, startled, whether he could have come down and out and gone away without seeing her.

But that would not be like him. He was full of calm, thorough method. Still her anxiety led her back into the hall to watch the elevator doors opening, the passengers streaming out into the blue haze of the evening.

No doubt Douglas had been kept waiting. The interview itself could not have endured so long.

It was fifty minutes after he left her before she saw him again, walking beside big, handsome Paul Messenger. The rich man walked with his head lifted, his eyes straight forward, while Douglas Lamont hurried along half sidling as he turned toward his companion, still arguing—appealing vainly to an immovable figure, it seemed to the girl.

She was all at once cold with shame and hot with anger; but now as they drew nearer she was able to look more closely into Messenger's face and she saw that he was removed from her brother not by boredom and disdain but by the dream in which he was moving. The hypnotized, sleep-walker look was in his eyes.

She trailed after them. Even on the sidewalk her brother did not look about for her. He still was lost in his own talk as he climbed into Messenger's big car; and now they were gone in the traffic.

But she was not left alone. The certainty that Messenger had been entranced by the plan of her brother was ample reward and company for her. She only needed, now, someone to whom she could pour out her happiness.

There was Jimmy Kildare, of course. So she headed straight back to the hospital.

THE whole ponderous mass of the Blair Hospital seemed unsubstantial to her as she entered it.

This work of Douglas, which eventually would take the millions back to the soil and the strength that comes out of it, must do away with a great part of our medical needs. Health comes with bending of the back. Out of such planning there must appear a mightier nation, simpler, less hurried, genially content with life.

She was walking in another century when she came to the waiting room of Gillespie with that famous sign in brass: *Dr. Leonard Gillespie. Office Hours: 12 a.m. to 12 a.m.* in token of his twenty-four hour day.

It was a miracle to find, as she did now, no more than half a dozen patients waiting. There was a tall woman with a sullen face and the clothes and manner of the

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great lady; there was a little Italian laborer, asleep in his chair; a scrawny boy sitting close to his mother; a Negress, huge with fat and dusty with fear; and an elderly man sleek with too many decades of good living—sleek, and soft, and rosy.

The girl said to Conover, the big Negro who presided over the waiting room: "Is Doctor Kildare taking the line-up, or Doctor Gillespie?"

A dull roar came from behind the door, calling: "Next patient!"

Conover smiled, for Gillespie had answered in his proper person. Mary Lamont crossed to Kildare's office and opened the door without knocking. That was his own request.

She was stepping in and closing the door behind her when the voice of Kildare stopped her, saying: "I agree, Mr. Messenger. I think that *he* might put the thing through. But I'm not sure that he will have the strength to do it. . . .

"I can't tell. It's simply that I guess at something pathologically wrong with him. . . . I'm only telling you this because I had to introduce him to you . . . .

"No, no, I think he's the most honest man in the world; but I'd like to have you submit his idea to a group of experts —experts in relief, housing, and all the things that he talks about. . . ."

"I'm glad you agree. . . . I don't know what's wrong. Nerves, perhaps . . ."

She stepped back from the room and closed the door soundlessly behind her.

CHAPTER IV

DIAGNOSIS DEFERRED

WHEN Mary went into the Nurses' Home, she met Molly Cavendish about to go back on duty, looking always weary, always formidable.

The great Gillespie swore that she was the finest head nurse in history; she also was one of the most severe. There was no more delicacy in her than there is in a Missouri mule. Even into the private affairs of her nurses she pawed her way; because an unhappy nurse is apt to get absent-minded, said the Cavendish, and therefore she wished to know the minds of her nurses as well as she knew their faces.

Mary Lamont, remembering all the kindnesses she had received from this dour woman, smiled as she passed her on the stairs; but there was no smile left when she reached her room.

The bed tempted her. She wanted to throw herself face down on it; but it was necessary for her to attempt to think. So she sank into a straight-backed chair and let her thought return to the voice of Kildare, quiet, a little nasal, always grave, as he had said: "I don't know what's wrong. Nerves, perhaps."

"Nerves" is a word with a thousand meanings, including certain dreadful connotations from which her mind shrank away. Her eye automatically picked up the features of her room, in the meantime.

No social worker could have found anything wrong with it. It was an airy, clean, dry, substantial room with plenty of cubic yards of air space. The furniture was solid. Clearly it had been bought by someone who understood the wholesale world and how to get values.

On everything there was the sign of quantity production which saves us so many, many dollars. Not a thing in the room could give offense to anyone; and therefore there was nothing that could give pleasure, either.

It was a room like a gray day. Even if it had not faced north, sunshine would have been a stranger in it.

Mary Lamont could not have told why this room made her heart ache, because she was not a very logical thinker; but instinct had made her hang on the wall a warm Chinese print that opened the room like a window to the south. She looked now at the white crane that stood on one leg in the green water and among the brown rushes. They crossed and recrossed in a pattern that gave her quiet pleasure, always; but nothing gave pleasure, now.

She glanced at her shelf of books. She

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was not a great reader, it must be admitted. The gilt edges of her Bible had not been worn by much fingering and turning of the page.

Except for *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* and *Othello,* her one-volume copy of Shakespeare had sticky edges that never had been parted. She liked the famous love scene in the third act of *The Tempest,* except that Miranda was rather simple in giving everything away so quickly; and when she felt up to it, sometimes she read her *Othello* from the undressing scene with Emilia through the murder. It frightened and nauseated her; she was very glad and yet she was somewhat sorry, also, that modern man is not blown by such tempests of passion.

Beside the two famous books, she had some volumes of Lubbock which the man of her first love affair, some years before, had given to her. *The Chinese Clippers* and *The Colonial Clippers* and *The Log of the Cutty Sark* were not in themselves interesting to her; but she kept the books on the shelf because they reminded her of the brown face of that sea-lover, and the finely incised lines about his eyes that came from squinting above the glare of the sunlit ocean.

She was proud that *The Way of All Flesh* was on the shelf and that she had read it through; because when she spoke of Earnest, serious, literate people were apt to look at her with new eyes. This pride led her to speak highly of Butler's grim book; but actually he made her shudder, he so leveled out life to a hateful monotony.

She had a few best sellers, though she wondered why they had to be so very long. There was also a battered copy of *The Prisoner of Zenda* which she kept defiantly on the shelf because she had adored it so much in her girlhood; and because she still hoped to meet some great, brave man with a red beard.

Of them all, two little thin, worn volumes of Katherine Mansfield were perhaps nearest to her heart. Mansfield made her determine to rub her eyes wide awake and begin to see things in detail; half a dozen times she had started a "Journal" of her own, and though she never carried the effort beyond a few pages, the knowledge that the notebook was in the top bureau drawer was a comfort.

It enabled her to talk with an understanding sympathy when she met a writer; it made her confide to a friend, now and then that if her life had been different—if there had been a chance really to live—if there had been just a *little* leisure—who knows?

AS MARY faintly entered upon those old paths of thought, she was aware of something knocking on her mind like a hand at her door.

It was water dripping in the shower. She got up and jammed the lever so hard that she hurt her hand. The dripping stopped.

The physical pain gave her an odd relief. And as she came back into her room she saw Molly Cavendish standing in the open door. Something about her settled attitude showed that she had been there for minutes.

"Well, out with it," said the Cavendish.

"There's nothing," said Mary.

"That's a lie," said Molly Cavendish. "You're afraid because you've done something; or because something is about to be done."

Mary went to her, smiling.

"I'm quite all right," she said. "It's sweet of you, but there's nothing wrong. Do come in."

"Oh, shut up!" said the Cavendish.

"I'm sorry," said Mary. "I don't really know what you—"

"Stop this damned baby-talk and naivete," said the head nurse. "Something has scared you to death. What is it?"

"But not a thing has happened to me," said Mary.

"To that lunk-head, Kildare, then?"

"Jimmy? No, he's as happy as his work lets him be."

"And *you're* almost happy, too, you think you're lying so well. But you're not fooling me."

She raised her big head and looked up

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toward that God who listens to impatient people. "Those silly little brats!" she confided to His ear. "The fact is," she went on to Mary, "that you're scared to death because you think I might find out what's in your mind."

"No, Miss Cavendish. Of course not. There's not a thing that I wouldn't—and happily—not a thing—of course I'd tell you anything, and if I seem—"

"Bah! Stop gushing!" said Molly Cavendish. "You'd talk to me as soon as you would to a mother, I suppose? All this damned sweetness doesn't melt in *my* mouth, Mary Lamont. I tell you, you're in such a dither that I wouldn't put you on a serious case. You're as full of jitters as a baby's rattle; and mind you, I won't stop till I've found out what it is!"

She slammed the door suddenly and left the loud echo inside the room with Mary. There was no other sound. Even the mournful voice of the city was lost, so that Kildare's words came back to the girl more clearly than ever: "I don't know what's wrong. Nerves, perhaps."

SHE began to sicken with fear again until a fine little glow of anger came to her rescue. She could remember her brother back almost to her infancy and there never had been a fellow of more steady and sober judgment. Of all the men she had known in the whole world, she told herself, there never had been one *more* sane than Douglas Lamont.

What about Jimmy himself, jousting at windmills, championing lost causes? What about the great Gillespie with his passions and ragings? There was nothing wrong with Douglas except the fire and light of a great idea.

But even as the thought passed through her mind, she began to grow cold with fear once more; for she knew that in Kildare there was the talent of the born diagnostician, sharpened to a needle-point by the training he received from Gillespie.

He had not come into his full power, to be sure, but he missed so rarely, so rarely! The whole hospital knew about him. Even among residents and internes there no longer was any jealousy. They were not shamed if they could not equal Kildare.

They looked up to him as to a genius; they pitied him because he was paying the price of devoted slavery which the genius always pays, his life subdued to his talent. And it was this Kildare who had seen something horribly wrong in Douglas.

She strained her attention and her memory of the scene between Douglas and Kildare. There was nothing strange about it. Douglas had been very sleepy until he warmed, suddenly, as a man of mind will do, to his theme.

And might it not be that Kildare, bighearted as he was, had been a little touched with jealousy when he saw her hanging so breathlessly on every word Douglas spoke?

It was at this moment, just as she was arguing herself back into a degree of confidence, that she remembered her grand-uncle, Peter Lamont. He was as thin as a wraith in her recollection, but it was a distorted wraith. The thought of some hereditary evil rushed on her.

She sat for a moment with her eyes tightly shut, then she got pen and paper and forced herself to write:

Dear Cousin Charles:

You know how things drop suddenly into a person's mind? Suddenly I've found myself thinking about our grand-uncle, Peter. All the Lamonts ought to know all about one another, but it seems to me that no one ever speaks about Uncle Peter; and there's just a ghost of a memory that something horrible happened to him—and something went wrong with him before the end.

I remember a big man with wild hair and a tremendous voice, always shouting. Is that right? I remember him so clearly that all at once I simply have *to find out what became of him. Do let me know. You're the family historian, you know.*

Affectionately,
Mary

She sealed the letter. The taste of the mucilage lingered in her mouth until she forgot the cause of it. It became part of the strange dread that possessed her.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Well of the Moon

BY E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Author of "Yaqui Gold," "King of Knaves," etc.

The trail across the burning sands, oh white man, is strewn with pain and peril. It seems such a long, weary journey to undertake in the search for a bag of mail, for a man's sanity, and for honor. Complete Novelet of the Near East

I

PILGRIMS were coming back from Holy Mekka, and Damascus was crowded with them. There were raw-boned Kurds, and hawk-nosed Afghans, and stocky Uzbeks from Central Asia in the throng that pushed across the crowded plaza. Everyone who could afford to wanted to cross the Syrian Desert by motor bus to Bagdad. The town was full of business, but none of it did Dan Morrow any good.

Morrow said to an Arab he had brought from Bagdad, earlier in the season and who wished to ride with him again, "I have no busses. They have taken and sold

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He closed his ears to the moaning of the foot-sore natives; he could only help one at a time

them." The rugged American stood in the arched doorway of the barnlike building; his tanned face was weary, and his gesture was weary. "See for yourself. The only thing left is the grease on the floor."

The Arab stroked his beard. "Be of good cheer, brother, they have not yet jailed you for debt." Having delivered this pious sentiment, he turned to cross the square, where another wildcat bus was taking on passengers.

Morrow turned with a scowl to the only other relic of the bus line—the partner who sat there, muttering. Lew Corey was as tall and broad and brown as Morrow; he looked as strong, his jaw was as rugged, his hands hard and square and scarred; wheeling a bus across the Syrian Desert is no job for a lightweight. But Corey had a weak spot somewhere, and it had cropped out now in the face of their disaster. He squatted on the dirt floor, and muttered, "I was held up and I can prove I didn't run off the road on purpose —I can prove I was held up—"

Just like that. No expression at all. His eyes riveted in a queer, fixed stare. Sometimes he got up and began hunting in the empty corners of the garage. He was looking for a leather pouch of registered mail. If he could only find that pouch, he would find himself along with it; or so Morrow hoped.

If Lew Corey didn't snap out of it, Mor-

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row would have to take him back to the states before they threw him into the whacky-house in Damascus.

Corey was resuming his search, crawling over the floor, looking in corners. Turbaned Arabs paused, eyed him, and muttered. Madmen were especially holy, they thought; but at a distance. Morrow yelled, "Cut it out!" He shook his head as if to dislodge a sudden pain or dizziness, and muttered, "Pretty soon I'll be nuts myself!"

EVERY day, Morrow led his partner around Damascus, hoping that Corey might be reminded of something which would prove that it had been a bona fide robbery, not an inside job. If Lew Corey could clear himself, he might regain his scrambled wits. But for those rumors, the loss of the registered mail could have been lived down; as it was, people said that there was too much coincidence about the robbery at Ayn el Qamar.

An engine rumbled in the tin-roofed shed near the caravan-men's inn, right across the plaza, and a ten-year-old Rolls Royce touring car poked its long nose into the street. The radiator shell gleamed, and the blue lacquer was waxed. Instead of the original canvas top, there was a fixed, solid roof, with a brass railing all around; here luggage, cans of gasoline, and two extra tires were carried.

The man at the wheel was Emile Jourdain, once Morrow's competitor, and now the only wildcat bus operator running between Damascus and Bagdad. The Frenchman grinned, waved at Morrow. "How you like my new one? Me, I take good care of her, is it not so?"

Jourdain was driving what had once been the Morrow & Corey bus; the *"Mim-Kaf"* line, as the natives called it, because of the initials of the partners. With their license revoked because of the robbery, there had ben nothing to do but sell out. Morrow did not blame Jourdain for buying; someone had to take the old Rolls. It was Jourdain's smile that grated on his tattered temper.

Morrow shouted in French, "Pull up, and I'll wipe the grin off that dirty mug of yours!"

The bus was piled high with luggage, and crowded with chattering women, squalling children, and bearded Arabs. The big liners took the white passengers, though sometimes an engineer or oilfield employee, cleaned out in a big game, made the 600-mile hop from Bagdad in a wildcat.

Then Morrow saw that Lew Corey had quit crawling. He was getting to his feet; he looked big as the Farâdis Gate, and his fists opened and closed, slowly. He was grinning, licking his lips. Something had awakened him from his stupor. Morrow thought, "Good Pete, he's sure gone nuts now for fair!" He shouted. "Hold it! Wait a second, Lew."

Morrow tried to grab Corey's arm, but he might as well have tackled a sandstorm. His partner howled; letting out with a singsong cry that sounded horribly like the wail of the women hired to moan at funerals; and something like the howling of the dervishes at the monastery in the block behind the garage. Finally Corey's voice reminded Morrow of the jackals who play in the graveyards, out beyond the bank of the Barada.

The Moslems who crowded the square made a path two yards wide. "I take refuge from Satan!" they yelled. While madmen are supposedly close to Allah, it is always possible that Iblis or one of his assistant Satans has gained possession of the demented. A wise Moslem was taking no chance.

They did however get in the way of Morrow and the advancing bus. Jourdain yelled, *"Allez!"*

They ignored his curses and his horn blasts, and he was too busy with traffic to see what was coming from the side. Though he heard the howling, the disturbance had no personal meaning until Lew Corey leaped to the running board. Then Jourdain saw that Corey had a spanner in one hand, and an ugly snicker on his face.

"Hey—you—"

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Corey cracked down with the spanner, and toppled Jourdain across the three Arabs jammed in the front seat. Still on the runningboard, Corey took the wheel, and straightened the bus out as she swerved. He unlatched the door, slipped behind the wheel; horn braying, the bus nosed through the crowd.

Corey shouted, "All aboard for Ayn el Qamar, Bagdad, Herat, and points East! All aboard for Kashgar, Khatmandu, and Qomul!"

Morrow knocked squalling natives out of his path as he charged, shouting, "Wait a second, Lew! I'm going too!" But Corey paid no attention. Morrow leaped for the runningboard. He missed by an inch, and landed on the cobblestones. Howling natives trampled him.

COREY was swinging east, for the river, and toward the Syrian Desert. When Morrow got to his knees, the back of the blue bus was making the first corner. Not a native was hurt or killed, for all the speed Corey made in second gear. Maybe he *was* crazy, but he still could drive.

Gendarmes were yelling and running around. Black Senegalese soldiers in blue uniforms turned out. There was one shot, but the rumble of the big engine never wavered. She had a deep voice, from a cut in the muffler; a flying rock had done that. And by the sound, Morrow could picture it all as he hobbled with the crowd pouring past him on both sides.

In another couple of seconds, the muffler drumming was too faint to be heard over the howling of all Damascus. Perhaps ten minutes later, a military reconnaissance car went tearing out through the gardens of El Amara, but Morrow knew they would have no chance; not with Corey booting the old Rolls across a desert whose every rock and well and *wadi* he could find with his eyes closed.

It was midnight when the military patrol returned, dusty and disgusted. Morrow, waiting at the barracks, saw that they had not found Corey. The lieutenant in charge would not give him any information, but Morrow finally managed to see the officer of the day.

Captain Durand saw no reason for hysteria, though he was sociable enough, and his straight mouth achieved a smile. "Sit down, Monsieur Morrow." He offered a pack of the *Bastos* he smoked in preference to finer tobacco that did not smell like burning rags. "I regret to say, one does not know where Monsieur Corey is. They found the bus not far from Ayn el Qamar —the scene of the robbery, not so? Well. Jourdain was groggy, but able to drive, so he went on."

"Captain, you mean you didn't search?"

Durand shrugged, made a grimace whimsical enough to second his gesture. "You would know that country better than I do. The earth is too rocky for tracking. The passengers, they say that your partner ran across the desert."

"In which direction?"

"No two agreed. What would you expect?"

"Oh, hell, Captain! I do not expect you to burst into tears, but this poor devil is my partner. You've got to find him."

Durand ground out his strong cigarette, and readjusted his gold braided cap. "*Monsieur,* either he finds shelter long before we could find *him,* or he dies of sunstroke. If he lives long enough, he'll meet nomads, and they will feed him."

"They'll peel him to his bare hide, and turn him loose."

"No, *monsieur.* He is mad, and it is unlikely that they will harm him."

Morrow controlled his temper in the face of Gallic pragmatism. "But you could turn out a patrol."

Durand sighed, prayed for patience. "Let us be rational! Either he comes through all right, or he is dead before we find him. Is it that the army is here to keep peace in Syria, or is it for sentiment?"

Morrow said, bitterly, "France never was anywhere for sentiment."

Durand took that calmly. "Be pleased not to judge me by my duty. No, *monsieur,* I cannot and I will not take it up with the commanding officer, I know the

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result in advance. And do not think we like that Jourdain. Merely because he is French does not commend him to us. Some of us believe that he could have started the story about the faked robbery. Privately, this Jourdain impresses me as a species of an odor." Durand rose, and extended his hand. "*Monsieur*, I regret that I am not permitted to help. But you have my best wishes in your private search."

"Huh? I didn't say—"

Durand smiled. "You did not. But I would bet a month's pay that you will go."

He bowed, and Morrow went out. There was just the chance that instead of running crazily over the desert, Corey might be lurking somewhere in the neighborhood of the robbery, pawing, digging, looking for the same clues he had been seeking in the garage floor. This was the only chance that could justify Morrow's search —the one chance to make himself believe that he might find Corey alive.

II

THOUGH it was late when he returned to his house in the Amara suburb, Morrow did not go to bed but sat up, planning and smoking until his head reeled. Finally he went into the little garden where orange trees made the cool air fragrant.

He paced up and down the worn flagstones. At last he knelt beside the icy fountain that was fed by the waters of the Barada, and plunged his head into the basin. He came up blinking, and took a fresh start.

Every detail of his planned expedition was clear enough, except that he did not know whether to risk the trip alone, or to get a guide. He knew several trustworthy natives, but for all their good intentions, they were given to chattering. To buy a motorcycle and sidecar would make him conspicuous. Jourdain would hear about that, and almost as soon as if he broke into Jourdain's garage and took the Frenchman's cycle and sidecar.

No two ways about it: a donkey, doing twenty miles a day, was the best approach. Captain Durand was right. If Corey had raced crazily over the desert, he would be finished long before a man on a cycle could get to Ayn el Qamar and start the search. If Corey was living because of the awe the natives had for madmen, there was time enough to do things right, and try to prove that Jourdain had robbed the bus.

When Morrow went to bed, his decision was. "Get Ismeddin the Darvish."

Ismeddin knew every hidden spring which a donkey rider would have to find to live until he covered the hundred mile stretch of waste and came within sight of Ayn el Qamar, the Well of the Moon. And having decided to trust the darvish, Morrow went to sleep.

A darvish is anything from a saint to a rogue; often, he is a mixture of both. There are darvish societies who spend their time whirling; others sit and howl the name of Allah. Then there are the individualists who belong to no order or monastery; these are jugglers, doctors, poets, horse thieves, confidence men, all making pretence of having retired from the world to devote their remaining days to piety. Ismeddin was a public letter writer.

In the morning, Morrow gulped his coffee and set out for the native quarter. He crossed the square, the heart of Damascus; police and government offices lined both its sides. East of it was the old citadel, the great dome of Omar's Mosque, and the bazaars.

Morrow passed the coppersmith's bazaar, with its puffing bellows of goatskin, its showers of sparks, its clang of beaten metal. He turned into *Suk el Qamli*: the Louse Bazaar, where secondhand clothing, shoes, bedding and utensils were offered for sale. Here petty thieves brought their plunder, and here the poor came to buy or sell. And in an alcove scarcely a yard wide was a leathery man with a white beard, squatting where he could observe all passersby.

This was Ismeddin the Darvish. He had a saucer containing an ink-soaked wad of silken threads, a pad of cheap paper, and

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a sharpened reed. A barefooted Arab squatted in front of the old man, and offered him a sheet written in purple ink.

"What does it say, grandfather?"

The darvish read, *"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate! To Farouk the son of Fareed, living on the street called Djadeed, the blessing of Allah and His Benediction, from his brother Daoud. And after, know that our father Fareed is sick, and the taxes are high, and there is more ploughing than one man can do. Send me ten pounds Egyptian, and God will bless you."*

Ismeddin looked up, smiling shrewdly. "Are you going to send him the money?"

"Send him ten pounds? He's been living off the old man for years, now he'll get half the farm—and he wants me to help stave off the taxes? Tell that father of many pigs—"

Ismeddin wrote swiftly. Then he read, *"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate! To Daoud, the son of Fareed, the Benediction of Allah, the Peace and Blessing, from his brother Farouk. Know that I am sorely tried, and about to be jailed for debt. Beg from our father twenty pounds Egyptian and redeem me from the prison that yawn like the grave that awaits all men: and Allah will requite thee, O Brother."*

Farouk's eyes were wide. *"Wallah,* that is a letter." He paid a small silver coin, and headed for the post office.

Morrow said, *"Ya* Ismeddin, you know the desert as well as you know your pens, I have better work than writing."

The darvish looked up; his eyes had a youthful sparkle when he quoted, *"Night and the desert and the horses know me.* But which desert are you crossing, *sahib?"*

"Which, but the one between here and Bagdad."

Ismeddin's white beard spread out over his chest when he bowed his head, and held one lean hand over his eyes. In a moment he looked up. "If you go to find your mad brother, I can help you. Though a putt-putt bicycle would be better."

"It is necessary to ride donkeys. I know the way. But you must go to bring the animals back to town."

"So you are staying in the desert?"

"When I get to where I am going, I cannot bother feeding or watering a donkey. And who knows when I come back?"

Ismeddin nodded. "God does what he will do."

Morrow peeled off some hundred *franc* bills. "Buy donkeys and whatever is needed. We go to Ayn el Qamar, and the less you say the better for us both."

"If you are planning what I think, it will not be well for anyone to know of it. You live on the Street of Oranges, *sahib?* In Al Amara?"

"That's right. I'll be waiting for you." And Morrow went back to his house to catch up sleep. Now that he had committed himself, he realized how tired he was.

THEY rode out of Damascus that night on plodding, moth-eaten donkeys. Morrow's heels nearly dragged the ground. The darvish crouched in the saddle like an oversized cat. The moon rose over the barren desolation of flint and baked earth; ahead, jackals howled, and hoot owls cried.

They camped at a water hole that only a bird could have found. Ismeddin squatted near the mouth of one of the rocky clefts that seamed the desert. He clawed among the thorns and shards of flint. Finally brackish water rose in the basin.

Long before dawn, Morrow ate a leathery flap of bread and some dried apricots. In the gloom ahead, there was a far off glow; then a rumble. A heavily loaded car thumped and rattled past the water hole. This was Jourdain, coming from Bagdad he would reach Damascus before dawn. And a few minutes later, Morrow and the darvish rode through the chill that became a fierce blaze when the sun stared them full in the face.

For the first time, he knew the Syrian Desert. He had cursed it, with lips baked by its hot blast as he drove the old Rolls; its wind-blown grit had reddened his eyes.

Changing tires, or replacing a cracked plug on a smoking engine, out there in the

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waste, had been bad. But now he met the desert as men had truly faced it since time began.

The whole rolling plain wove and shimmered and danced. Spirals of dust reeled crazily toward him, then veered off.

Nothing lived; this he believed, in spite of the stirrings and chirpings and twitterings heard at night. But those furtive creatures of the waste had sense enough to seek cover by day.

Basalt ledges loomed up. Iron black crags jutted from the cracked brown earth. And everywhere, unrelenting heat.

It was bad facing the sun; it was worse having the sun beat down into that ragged head cloth whose trailing ends protected the back of his neck; but worst of all was the ferocity at his back, when his own shadow and the donkey's reached far ahead.

Whenever he unslung the goatskin water-flask from the high-pommeled saddle, Ismeddin said, "Desert men do not drink between halts."

So he did his best to be a desert man, bad as it was.

Sometimes Morrow thought that the dust columns dancing over the waste were darvishes gone crazy with the heat. Finally the old man let him have a short sip of water. It was hot and foul from the untanned goatskin.

Five days of it, and Morrow no longer was sure whether he was in Damascus, in Bagdad, at the wheel of a car, or on the back of a donkey. Sometimes, he thought that Lew was riding with him. Even at night, he could not shut out the desert glare; for behind closed red lids, his eyes still throbbed, still saw the sky that had not a trace of blue, only the searing dirty yellow of flying dust.

But one evening Morrow saw something dark in the East, and something of white flecking it. The donkeys quickened their pace. They smelled water, and soon he knew that the patch whose shape was all twisted by the mirage was an oasis. Ismeddin said, "Yea, Allah has been good. It is Ayn el Qamar, the Well of the Moon."

III

MORROW gestured toward the ravine that gashed the brown desert. "Into that *wadi!* Before someone sees us."

The darvish led the way down the steep bank. Heat rose in choking waves from the rocky bottom. Ismeddin said, "We had the light behind us. They cannot see us from the Well of the Moon, not even a desert man can look against this glare."

While the darvish tended to the animals, Morrow scouted about for bits of brush and dry roots that had drifted down the *wadi* during the last rain, a long time ago.

Ismeddin made a smokeless fire. Morrow said, "It won't take long to heat a rock down here! But your return trip—is there enough water to carry you to the next camp?"

The animals had gotten a none too generous drink. Ismeddin considered the water skins, and then regarded the batter he had spread out on the hot rock to bake. "But what of you, *sahib?* No food except this stack of cakes, and no water except this bag, or in that well. These oasis people aren't always hospitable. At the best, they are soon sick of feeding a stranger."

Morrow grinned. "That's exactly what I'm betting on."

The darvish's right eyebrow rose in a pointed arch. "Since you want me to go and take the long-ears with me, it is on my head and on my eyes, I do as you say."

They ate the leathery bread, and some dried apricots, some stone-hard Syrian cheese.

"*Sahib,* think a while before you send me back."

Morrow sighed. "I'm tired of thinking. I'm all thought out."

The darvish stretched out on the rocks where an overhang had kept them from getting too hot. He slept for perhaps two hours, and then sat up, fresh and alert. "I go now, *sahib,* and the benediction upon you."

Morrow helped him pack up. When the white-bearded man and the scrawny donkeys headed up the steep slope to the

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desert's surface, Morrow said, "Peaceful journeying!"

He had an automatic pistol, a canteen of water, and a dozen or so leathery cakes of bread. Also he had a crow bar, and a kit of tools. His retreat was cut off; but there was no longer a risk of stray animals betraying him to the villagers.

Once darkness had spread over the purple plain, Morrow realized that for all his crossings to Bagdad, he had never known solitude before. But darkness was Morrow's signal to get to work.

He went to a boulder he had spotted, not far from the place where the wildcat bus made its crossing. The slope was steep and rutted, but a loaded car could make it; the only spot for miles around where the *wadi* could be crossed by any vehicle.

The heavy crowbar gave Morrow leverage, but for all that, it was tough going. He had to pick smaller rocks to use as a fulcrum; and then he barely dislodged the boulder. He had to rest before levering it over for a second time.

The moon was rising. Each clump of tamarisk, each knoll cast a long shadow across the waste. For a while, the rocky ridge that rose near the oasis was a ragged bulk against the moon.

Then Morrow saw the tall man who came toward him. He wore an Arab cloak and headcloth, both white. It was too late to duck for cover.

SEEING that tall form pop up out of the nearer shadows startled Morrow, and alarmed him; if only because observation by the villagers could block his move against Jourdain. He stood there, crowbar in both hands, and a rush of sweat on his face.

But the second shock was not long in coming; he had not yet decided how he would handle the newcomer when the tall man broke into a run straight for Morrow.

He waved a staff, and he howled as he bounded along. For a moment Morrow stood there, shaking violently. He was unnerved by that apparition in the silence and the emptiness, so far from the oasis. Whether to run, or to wait for the clash—

Then he recognized the howling; though he would not have, had he not heard Lew Corey's cries during that crazy flight from Damascus.

Corey must be unharmed, and well enough fed, or he could not dance along over the rough ground as he did.

The villagers must be feeding him at the oasis, or at least ignoring his thefts from their gardens; at all events, they must be aware of him.

Since he knew Corey was safe, Morrow dashed for the edge of the *wadi,* and down the motor trail. Once on the bottom of the ravine, he followed it in the direction of the village, for a hundred yards or so; then he scrambled up the steep bank and looked over the edge to see what his partner was doing.

Corey no longer howled. He had reached the motor trail, and was on his hands and knees. He had a flashlight, and was examining the ground that had been exposed when Morrow levered the boulder out of its bed.

By now, Morrow realized how right he had been in not accosting his partner. He reasoned, "Corey took me for a native, hunting something. So he scared me away to get a look. He must have a glimmering hunch. Something he tried to think of so hard he went nuts."

The only thing to do was to let Lew Corey have his head.

Presently, the madman finished his examination of the ground and the boulder, and crossed the *wadi,* heading along the trail in the direction of Bagdad.

He circled, and often paused, poking into clumps of tamarisk, or overturning small rocks.

Morrow did not follow. He had his own approach to the problem of finding the mail pouch, so he retraced his steps. When he reached the surface, and looked out across the desert, he saw that Lew Corey had abandoned his search; the madman was skipping about in the moonlight, yipping and howling. His general direction was the commanding ledge of rock, nearly

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three miles distant, and quite close to the oasis.

"Maybe I scared him out," Morrow reasoned, and resumed his work; each heave up-ended the boulder, toppled it over, a little nearer to its goal.

But he had not gained many feet when he saw the far-off glow of headlights; a bobbing brightness in the desert. For a while, they disappeared, but presently, rays reached skyward. Jourdain's bus was coming out of a gully.

Each time the headlights popped into view, Morrow was dismayed to see how much nearer the bus was.

Finally, a long pencil of light bridged the rolling stretch of desert immediately in front. Feet slipping, hands blistered, Morrow made that final heave.

The boulder rolled over the edge, first slowly, then gaining speed down the steep trail.

The rock swung to the left. It threatened to go on to the far side, and leave the road clear. He went over the lip, lever in hand. He stumbled, pitched headlong; but when he checked himself, battered and cut by the sharp fragments that were scattered over the bottom, he saw that the boulder had turned, and stopped. It blocked the trail.

If Jourdain tried to swing to the right or to the left, one wheel would sink among fragments of rock beside the road. Moving the boulder would be easier than stalling the loaded bus.

Morrow crouched in the shadow of the overhang of the bank, a few yards from the crossing. The moon had risen. As he waited, he heard the distant rumble. Presently, the earth transmitted the vibration, and pebbles ticked down the steep bank.

Gears whirring in low, she nosed over the edge. She was jammed with sleeping Arabs. The smell of garlic mingled with the scent of hot oil. Then the driver saw the obstacle; it was Jourdain. There had been no break in the routine. Morrow had not in error trapped the Frenchman's partner.

The brakes caught. Jourdain cursed. He slouched wearily, he was worn by the long drive, wrestling with the Syrian Desert for five hundred hammering miles. His black beard, his angular face, these were plain enough by the panel light.

He shook the Arab beside him. "Wake up! Get out and put rocks under the wheels."

The passenger crawled over his fellows, and stepped to the trail.

Morrow shrank into his shadow, but he still saw his picture of Jourdain. There was more than annoyance and weariness on the man's face; there was a touch of fear. Maybe that had been a trick of the lighting, but Morrow felt that Jourdain had memories of this place, memories that came back and now worried him.

This was where an unknown man had bounded from cover to slug Lew Corey and snatch the leather pouch of mail.

IT MUST have been Jourdain, though villagers from the Well of the Moon might have helped him. That the mail pouch had never turned up in Damascus, not even in the "Louse Bazaar," indicated that it must either be in Ayn el Qamar, or else lying out somewhere in the desert. No Arab thief, bringing his loot to Damascus, would have failed to sell the pouch at the second-hand market.

Jourdain alone, or Jourdain plus the villagers. The man was worried; worried because the villagers were trying the trick they had seen him do? The change in the Frenchman's face encouraged Morrow; the little seeds of fear would sprout more and more.

Jourdain shouted, "Wake up, wake up!" And shook the other dirty white bundles who snored beside him. An Arab sat up, yawning. Jourdain pointed and explained. Other passengers began to awake. Some blamed the boulder on evil spirits.

Jourdain roared, "Get out, all of you! Heave on that rock!"

Time was lost in wrangling and debating. Some grumbled, "Allah! Did we come here to work? How much fare do we get back?"

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The car, however, was not at all empty. There were women and children still jammed inside. These people reminded Morrow of a premature resurrection that had emptied a small graveyard.

Jourdain stood by, yelling and pointing as the Arabs clawed at the boulder. They got in each other's way. Where Morrow had a lever and gravity to help him, these fellows had only bare hands, and those working against each other at that.

Jourdain paced up and down, puffing a cigarette. He glanced sharply into the gloom to his right and left. Once he scrambled up the Damascus side, pistol drawn. He was sure that Satan had not put that rock there. But he never suspected that a man had darted from the shadows of the bank, and slid under the bus.

Even if he had seen Morrow, he would hardly have picked him from other men in headcloths and dirty white robes. Certainly he did not hear Morrow's chisel cut the fuel line.

Then one of the Arabs began to chant as he heaved. His fellows picked up the wailing about the boulder that Satan had dropped in the way. The dirty white huddle began to move rhythmically. The boulder rocked, settled back, rocked sidewise again. It tipped, and came to rest two feet nearer the edge of the trail.

In another moment, the bus was grumbling her way up the steep grade, and Morrow came from cover. She would not go far. Once her carburetor bowl was empty, the real game would start.

IV

THE bus barely cleared the grade when Morrow heard the backfiring and sputtering. Her floatbowl was empty and no more fuel was coming from the tank. Jourdain and his passengers were stranded three or four miles from Ayn el Qamar. That was what Morrow wanted.

He crept closer. Jourdain checked the ignition. He checked the fuel, and cursed dirty gas. He got a tire pump and tried to blow out the fuel line; it did no good.

Since there had been no surprise attack, Jourdain decided he had better wait until daylight to make a job of it. And being as tired as his passengers, he was soon snoring over the wheel.

When Morrow was sure he could risk it, he stepped to the rear bumper, and unlashed the two spare cans of fuel, and carried them into the *wadi,* where he hid them. That done, he drained the tank.

Some distance from the bus, Morrow found a boulder and sat down.

He was tired, but not sleepy. Or so he thought, until he began to nod. The fun would start when the villagers found themselves swamped with a hungry crowd that almost equaled the population of the little oasis.

The chill of dawn awakened Morrow. Behind his shelter, he watched the long shadows shorten. Sunrise glare blotted out the oasis. Birds skimmed over the purple desert for a little while before the heat flayed all that brown expanse. And Jourdain came from the wheel and set to work hunting the trouble. The Arabs squatted in the shade of the car, and gnawed onions and cakes of bread.

Jourdain soon came from under the bus, cursing. He had found the cut. He got his tool kit, and repaired the break. For a while, he spun the starter, then he checked the fuel again.

He straightened up, sharply. He clambered up to get a spare can. Morrow was sorry that he could not see the Frenchman's face when he began pawing among the luggage and waterskins.

"Lost—both of them—"

He dropped to the ground, and stood there, shoulders sagging. Jourdain could not be sure what had happened. The cords that lashed the fuel to the top could have been frayed. Morrow had cut them with sawing strokes.

Then the villagers loomed up against the rising sun; ragged, bearded chief, and young men in brown *jellabs.* They had rifles, and swords. One fired. There was a big puff of blue smoke, and a slug kicked up dust a dozen yards short of the bus.

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From the coughing blast, Morrow knew that someone had cut loose with a muzzle-loading musket. Three or four stragglers came on the run, catching up with the dozen who led the party.

The passengers were yelling and ducking for cover. Jourdain walked steadily toward the advancing party. They halted, and then he stopped for a parley.

The leader, gaunt and sharp-faced, thumped his chest. "I am Hamid, and the peace upon you."

He had been reassured by the lack of weapons, and his men lowered their guns. Jourdain answered, "We come in peace. We want food and water, and we will pay for what we need."

HAMID went into a huddle with his villagers. Morrow, still lurking behind his rock, could not catch a word. But he had little doubt of the outcome, since the passengers were too poor to rob. Jourdain gestured to them, turned and walked on with the chief.

Morrow joined the stragglers, though he trailed well behind. He was dressed as they were, and it was unlikely that any one could be sure he was a newcomer. As for the villagers, they did not know how many had come in the bus, and he had his story ready: he was a Kurd from the mountains beyond Bagdad.

His gray eyes, his angular face, his height and his lean frame made that plausible—unless he met another Kurd.

Morrow got to the village without any need for explanations. The natives took him for granted, and so did the passengers.

At closer range, Morrow saw that he had not been far wrong in his appraisal of Ayn el Qamar. And since neither he nor Corey had had any dealings with the villagers, either during their explorations to decide on the route, or thereafter, he had no qualms about being recognized by them.

Beyond the oasis, there was scanty grazing for the few sheep of Hamid's people. There were no camels. The nomads apparently supplied the people of the oasis with rice, and cloth, and sugar in exchange for dates, egg plant, cucumbers, and the rank tobacco which grew in nearly a quarter of all the soil that would support vegetation.

A sheep was slaughtered, and the village women made a kettle of stew, while others baked flat slabs of bread. The food was dished out in big platters, about which the passengers grouped themselves. It was Morrow's move, and he made it.

Three middle-aged Arabs, one nearly blind, were about to wash their hands before digging into the common dish; Nuh, Musa, and Ali, ropemakers from Bagdad.

Morrow stretched his legs toward the well, and picked up the earthenware jug of water. He said to Musa, whose eyes were inflamed, "Allah give you health," and offered to pour water over his hands. This mark of respect for age and feebleness won him an invitation to join the group. Morrow spoke the name he had chosen.

Soon the four were squatting about a steaming bowl of mutton stew, flipping back their right sleeves, and saying, "In the name of Allah!"

They were affable enough, particularly when Morrow offered them cigarettes. But he caught the glance that Nuh and Musa exchanged. He sensed the query. They knew that he was not a villager, and they did not recollect having seen him when the bus was loaded.

Ali addressed Morrow by his assumed Kurdish name: "What takes you to Damascus, Jawan Khan?"

"My cousin is a trader in the horse market, and next year, *inshallah*, I make the pilgrimage."

"Allah prosper you," the three said.

But he had no assurance that they were convinced. And he was glad when a village woman came to pick up the empty platter. This she refilled, and the stranded women and children took their turn.

Coffee was too scarce to waste on the passengers; Jourdain, however, was having a cup with Hamid, the headman. They sat on a rug outside the mud shack.

Already, the girls were driving the sheep

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out to pasture, and others went to work in the gardens. Some of the men joined them in fighting the stubborn soil, while others squatted under brush shelters, rifles ready; these lookouts were on the rocks that cropped up, and on knolls beyond the oasis.

Morrow strolled closer to where Jourdain and Hamid were smoking and drinking coffee; going very carelessly, as if looking for a cool place to nap. The stranded passengers, gathering in family groups, were doing the same.

Jourdain was saying, "We have lost our gasoline. Send a messenger to Damascus for me. I will pay you when help arrives."

"It is too far," Hamid objected. "It takes five days—six days—maybe seven to reach Damascus. Then coming back—Allah, how long can I feed all your people?"

"The quicker you send for help, the sooner we'll leave! Anyway, I have a motorcycle. It will carry your man back, and all the gasoline we need."

"La, wallahi!" Hamid made a decisive gesture. "If I send a man, there is just one less to defend the gardens, the flocks, the village."

"Please yourself. The longer we stay, the more we eat."

Jourdain, worried, was trying to bluff it out. Hamid, however, had a grim answer, "We can drive you into the desert after three days."

Morrow passed by, and found an unwatered palm tree; he seated himself, back against the trunk. He was certain of one thing: that Hamid and Jourdain were not friends. They had not committed the robbery together.

V

THE day wore on, and the savage sun beat down on the palms and the mud huts. This was the longest day that Morrow ever spent. *"Ana kurdim!"* he said to the curious villagers, and scowled. "I am a Kurd from Kurdistan."

He stalked boldly about, sizing up the gardens, and the grazing ground. The rocky ridge, less than a mile from the village, was full of caverns. By now he knew that was where Corey lived, more like an animal than a man.

He could get Corey back to Damascus by overpowering him, and forcing Jourdain to make room. But that was not the way; not until he had played out the very last chance of making Jourdain confess, and clearing Corey's name. Once exonerated, Corey might regain his senses simply by riding back and forth with Morrow on the bus.

Jourdain and Hamid continued their wrangling and smoking. The headman was still protesting. Jourdain's temper was cracking. Late in the afternoon, he leaped to his feet. "You can't run us out into the desert to die!"

Hamid sucked at his longstemmed pipe, and exhaled the acrid fumes. His cunning eyes gleamed, and he said, "Give me the devil wagon to drive back when you get your people to Damascus. I can use it." He tapped his chest, cocked his head so that his scraggly beard jutted out. "Like Ibn Saoud, the King of all Arabia. *Wellah,* I'll make raids, I'll hunt gazelles in it, as he does."

The girls were driving the flocks from the grazing grounds, and the guards were coming in. But most of Hamid's people were still some distance from the oasis when Jourdain made a choking sound, and drew his pistol.

"You—you—give me a guide and animals, or I'll blow your head off."

The passengers were alarmed; the men muttered, "I take refuge from Satan!"

Morrow darted in, drawing his own weapon. As Jourdain whirled at the crunch of sand, Morrow cracked down with the barrel. The blow numbed the Frenchman's wrist; he dropped his gun. Morrow said to Hamid, *"Ya malik,* the man forgets himself."

Hamid, too startled to try to draw his own pistol, still sat there. And then he realized that a man had called him "king". *"Min ent?"* he demanded. "Who are you?"

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"I am a Kurd from Kurdistan." Then to Jourdain, "There is no use telling him I'm not. He wouldn't believe you, and it wouldn't make any difference if he did."

"What—*mon dieu*—what's this? Where do you come from. Why?"

The passengers were on their feet, chattering. Morrow said to Musa, "*Ya shaykh,* be pleased to hand the king his pistol, he dropped it."

Musa obeyed, and Hamid carelessly thrust the weapon into his sash. A second pistol doubled his importance. He said, "Sit down, Jawan Khan." He clapped his hands, and shouted, "Coffee!"

Inside the house, a woman answered, "Coffee, by Allah!"

Hamid unfastened the dagger from his belt, and presented it, sheath and all; it was the traditional Arab *jambia,* broad-bladed, with a scabbard that was prolonged until it was shaped like the letter "J". "Take this, and may Allah profit you, Jawan Khan."

A young woman in a blue gown came out with coffee and a pipe. Jourdain seated himself, but he had nothing to say. The guards gathered around, squatting on the sand with their rifles over their knees. Morrow chatted with Hamid, until Jourdain finally whispered in French, "You fool, you'll be robbed with the rest of us."

Morrow answered in Arabic, "Shut up! I like it here."

The French ruled Syria; arrogance had made Jourdain lose his head. He cut into another pause and said, bitterly, "So you're using this fellow to get your bus back, eh?"

"No. I'm using your passengers to get that pouch of registered mail back. You're the guy, Jourdain. The value of the loot was not enough to be worthwhile. Just enough to break us up in business, and kill our reputation. Getting that mail contract meant that Lew and I were establishing ourselves in Syria and that was too much for you. So you robbed Lew to wipe out competition.

"If desert men took the stuff, why didn't they strip all the passengers, and the driver? That's their routine. You didn't follow it, because one man couldn't do that alone. More than that, you didn't want to kill a good business over this route by having passengers robbed."

Jourdain's eyes blazed. "You held me up last night! You put that rock in the way. You species of a camel, you stole my fuel."

Morrow politely concealed a yawn. "To prove that I stole your fuel is as hard as it is for me to prove that you robbed my partner. Robbed him on the one night when he'd be groggy. After doing a double tour, while I was sick with fever."

"When I get to Damascus—"

"You'll never get to Damascus, unless you meet Hamid's terms. You might as well like it."

BY SUNSET, the argument had gotten nowhere. There was time out for more mutton stew and tough bread. The passengers kept their eyes on Morrow. They were worrying about the prospect of being driven out into the desert, for they knew their own kind.

Whether or not they still believed that the self-styled Jawan Khan was a Kurd made little difference to Morrow; he had won a chance to play his game.

After wiping the mutton grease from his fingers, Morrow said to the Frenchman, "Help me find the registered mail, and I'll help you find your fuel."

"*Salaud!*" Jourdain's eyes blazed.

He wouldn't back down. Not now. But wait till he got into the desert, on foot; when his passengers ran out of water between the oasis and the next meager waterhole. The concentrated wrath and suffering of all those people would crack his stubbornness, and so would his own burning misery. Morrow had been through it, and he was planning to face it again.

It was dark now. The passengers were murky blobs against the sand into which they had made their beds. One by one, Hamid's men went to their huts. Jourdain rose. Morrow rose with him and said, "Going to hunt the gasoline?"

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Jourdain did not answer.

Morrow went on, "Might not be a bad idea to hike down the *wadi,* so you'll be near the trail when the moon rises. But suppose I wake these fellows up and tell them you're walking out on them? They know that one man, with no women and children, could make it."

By the firelight, Morrow saw the rage that twisted Jourdain's face; saw the clenched fists, the twitching features.

"I'll tell them you're to blame!"

Morrow shrugged. "Go ahead. You've already made a fool of yourself. Ever see an Arab that had faith in a man who slipped? Did anyone trust Lew Corey after that slip? So I'm boss. You need me to get you out of here. I came on foot, I can leave that way. I know how. You don't."

He turned to Hamid: *"Ya Malik,* give us permission to leave the light of your presence."

Then came a howling that made the passengers sit up, exclaiming; Lew Corey's inhuman wailing. It came nearer. Jourdain started, wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

Hamid said, "That is a holy man. Even though he was an infidel, Allah has spoken to him."

"I have not seen him in the oasis."

"He lives in a cave in the big rocks." Hamid gestured. "We set food out for him every day. He gets it after we have gone. Sometimes at sunset we see him praying on the high rocks."

Morrow said to Jourdain in French, "That's the saint you made. Lew Corey, looking for the mail pouch. Do you think you'll like walking back with me to Damascus?"

The Frenchman snarled deep in his throat, and would have rushed at Morrow. But there was no meeting with bare fists. Corey bounded into view, a tall scarecrow in a ragged garment cut very much like an old fashioned nightshirt. He stopped perhaps half a dozen yards from the group, and stood there, giggling and snickering, pointing at Jourdain. In the crook of his left arm he held a bundle wrapped in his headcloth.

The passengers and the oasis dwellers scrambled clear, and they called on Allah. Jourdain recoiled, trembling. Corey yelled, "I stone Satan, the damned! I drive Satan from the house of my friend!"

He threw pieces of dry sheep's dung at Jourdain. He repeated, "I stone the thief!"

Jourdain's color faded. "Stop it, you fool!" He lunged at the madman.

Corey whirled, laughing. Half a dozen Arabs leaped at Jourdain, crying, "Father of a pig. Do not hit a holy man!"

They dragged him to the sand, pummeling and kicking him. Their weight held him down, for all his struggling. Morrow said, "Cut it out, Jourdain, ease up. You're in a tough corner."

THE Arabs let Jourdain up. Then Morrow saw Corey bounding toward the edge of the oasis. As he raced into the gloom, the madman yelled, "I stone Satan, the damned!"

Jourdain was sitting up, panting. Morrow said, "Suppose I tell them that you robbed the holy man, that he spends each night looking for something that is lost?"

Jourdain rose, and said to Hamid, "I'll give you the devil wagon. And see here. This fellow rolled a rock in my way. He stole my gasoline. He hid it. Any time you make him find it, I'll get my people out of here."

Hamid's eyes played tricks; even by the glow of dying embers, Morrow could see that. Jourdain was no fool. At the moment when his stock was lowest, he made a final appeal to Arab avarice.

And Hamid was impressed.

Morrow could almost read that shrewd, sharp face, those cunning eyes. The man was thinking, "If I drive them out, and they die, the French may raid me, or take me when I send for *essence.* If I buy it lawfully, it is otherwise."

Jourdain pressed his advantage. "I will go with your guide, I will see to it that he does not get into trouble in Damascus."

"I must think on this," Hamid answered. "Suppose my man were seized as surety for two hundred years of taxes we have not

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paid? And the holy man hates you. I cannot trust my people with you, for evil would befall them."

Morrow cut in, "Let him stay here. Then if any evil befalls your men, you have him here for security. That is best."

"*Wellah,* that is best."

Morrow turned to Jourdain. "Before the boys return with fuel, Lew Corey will give you hell. He used to be a mug like you or me, but now he's a saint. He's whacky, but he knows he was robbed, and he knows you're the guy. And if these fellows get heated up, they'll take you to pieces."

"They wouldn't dare. They'd be bombed."

"No they wouldn't. I was talking to Captain Durand. Your own people think you're a heel."

"Go to hell!"

An hour had been used in putting the screws to Jourdain. Morrow felt his confidence slipping.

Hamid's urge to have a car, like the powerful emir of the Ruwalla tribe, was the unexpected stumbling block. He wondered if the following five or six days would give him any chance to talk Hamid out of the notion. His own diplomacy was kicking back.

Then a headlight beam swept the oasis. Jourdain bounded to his feet, shouting, "How do you like that! They've missed us in Damascus, there's a searching party coming for us!"

A moment later Morrow heard the deep note of the Rolls. The lights swept the oasis; the bus was close now, swinging broadside. And Lew Corey was howling, "All aboard for Damascus, Cairo, Kashgar!"

He had found the fuel; beyond any doubt he had seen Morrow hide it. He had tanked up, and he was on his crazy way, bound for God knows where. The drumming of the exhaust sickened Morrow so that he stood there, unable even to yell. Jourdain ran, shouting, "Stop! Stop! You fool—"

He tripped over a sleeping donkey and landed flat. The whole oasis was awake, and chattering Arabs stumbled over Jourdain. Morrow joined them. At the edge of the palm grove, he saw the headlight pencil reaching into the gloom. Corey was running hog-wild, and he did not care where he went. Unless an outcropping rock tore the crankcase off, he'd drive until he ran out of fuel.

VI

HAMID said, when the clamor died out, "It belongs to the holy man. Stay the three days that the holy traditions allow, and then go where Allah wills you to go."

Jourdain did not answer. He sat down against a tree. The women among his passengers began to wail. The men cursed him for a Jonah. Morrow said, "That madman is my brother, and I stay in his place, I stay to look out for him. To take him home if he returns."

Hamid answered, "That is well. But the others leave."

The finality of his voice shocked Jourdain into action. He got up and said to Morrow, "However you got out here, you can lead us back."

"I'm not interested. I want that mail pouch."

He turned away. He had not gone half a dozen paces when Jourdain ran after him. "All right—I took it—I hid it—you fellows were getting all the business. You damned foreigners—so I put you out of business—now see how much trouble you can make—the seals aren't broken—you still can't prove a thing—even if I do find it for you."

Morrow sighed. "I know you didn't think a man would go crazy over a trick like you pulled. You're just a chiseler, and getting you a few months in the jug isn't enough to bother with. I can't talk myself into blowing your head off, so I'm not doing a thing. Get out of my sight and don't come back without the mail pouch."

Jourdain turned, and started walking. The moon was rising.

The villagers had stood there, wide eyed, open mouthed. When Jourdain left, Hamid

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said to Morrow, "You have cursed him for your brother's sake, you will not take him with you when you lead those others home?"

"How do you know I'm leading them home, *ya malik?*"

The Arab answered, "You are a man among men, you would not let them starve, you would not let them stay here to make us starve. We know now that you did not come here in the Shaytan-wagon. Not with your enemy. So you must have walked over the desert from Damascus, for where are your animals if you rode?"

"Brother, it is as you say. I walked one way, and all these can walk back with me, it is easy." Morrow pointed to the stars. "To one who is guided."

Hell was before him, but he was content. His hunch in sending Ismeddin back with the donkeys had been justified. So would the rest.

An hour later, Jourdain returned with a leather pouch, lock and seals intact. "Here you are!" He flung it to the ground.

The bus passengers slept, and Morrow tried to. He had no fear of Jourdain's slipping up on him, for he, Morrow, held all those lives in his hand; and *that* was what made his sleep a twitching nightmare.

AT DAWN, he was up. He said to Hamid, "Give me two donkeys, and Allah will pay you. For the sake of the holy man."

"We have too few. There is the water wheel to turn, and the mill." But when Morrow stood there, looking at the French pistol in Hamid's belt, Hamid grimaced and said, "Take them, and give me what money you can."

So Morrow emptied his pockets. And when the Arabs from Bagdad marched out with their women and children, there were two water-laden donkeys in the sorry column. Jourdain walked with Morrow. The Frenchman said, "I hope that mail pouch is worth what it's costing you."

Morrow patted the heavy leather bag he had slung from his shoulder. "Let's not wrangle. If I can get started again, driving another bus of my own, I'll raise enough money to send him home. This mail pouch will make my credit good again."

Children whimpered and lagged. Their mothers carried the smaller ones, and that slowed the procession. There were the three old men, Musa, Ali and Nuh: no one could carry them. They dragged along over the hot soil, stumbled over the hot rocks.

And there were complaints about hoarding the water: for these were town Arabs who did not know the desert.

An hour passed. There was no wind. Each traveler choked in a cloud of his own dust, the dust that rose from patches of crumbling earth. When there was no dust, there were sharp rocks. Morrow looked back, and it hurt him to see how near the oasis was. Worse, he knew that he was setting too fast a pace. The column was stretching.

Jourdain pointed ahead, where the motor trail came out of the *wadi*. "It'll be better going now."

"No. That road's thirty miles longer than the way we have to take. We're heading for water holes, we're taking short cuts that no car can take."

Another hour. Morrow had picked his landmark, a rocky knob that danced on the horizon. A yellow haze hid its base; the sky was becoming a dirty brown. Finally he said to Jourdain, "Lead on, to that knob. Don't give them any water. Crack them on the head with your staff, but keep them from the water skins."

"Where are you going?"

"To the tail of the column. To keep them closed up."

He waited; standing seemed to give the sun a better chance to hammer him. He licked his dry lips and gestured to the Arabs. "A little faster, O Lady!" he wheedled, "we eat and drink when we camp."

When an old woman staggered past, he said, "O Mother, this is no place to rest. They wait for you, up ahead, and no one drinks until all are there."

He wanted to shoulder the bundle she carried on her head, but it was not yet time

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for such encouragement. The pockmarked man, and Ali and Nuh walked along, slowly but steadily. Morrow wheedled them into stretching their stride. This was wrong, he knew; but while they had strength, he had to get them from the sight of the oasis. Once they were out in the emptiness, desperation would give them fresh power—for a while.

Later, he called a halt, but issued no water. "It is far to the first well," he said. "A fine, cool well. But it is far, very far."

By midafternoon, he had changed his story. He prodded the stragglers by saying, "Only a little further—see how close we are to the rocky knob. A fine, cold well at its foot."

"Where is the greenness?" old Ali croaked.

"Dust hides it, *ya shaykh!* Allah give you strength."

THE sun was setting when Morrow halted the parade. The rocky knob was still far away. He could no longer drive the travelers, and he was hoarse from wheedling, coaxing, scolding. So he made a cold camp, in a wide stretch of bare clay, all cracking in the sun. There was no fuel; only water, and dates, and bread from the oasis.

Jourdain, standing there in the brief twilight, looked at the weary travelers. They had eaten, and they had stretched out, exhausted.

"You'll never get them to the first well."

"We're in this together," Morrow said. "You didn't know, and I didn't know."

The plight of all these people made him forget his wrath. When he thought of Corey, he said to himself, "He's got crazy luck, he'll outlive us all. Even if he cracks up, he'll get back to the well of the moon."

It was not long after midnight when Morrow awakened his people. The desert moon made the far off landmark clear. This was the goal, but he was not sure he could drive them to it. He went among them, shaking them, jerking them to their feet. "Up, go, while it is cool!" His own feet were sore; he ached for all those people he had urged on, faster than they should have gone. "Jourdain, get along!"

A child whimpered. The others were silent. Morrow watched them, the dead who had not yet died. The white line plugged along. Morrow had ridden a donkey, and found that a slow death. Now he was walking. He saw an old man, asleep on his feet, fold and slump in a heap. He raised his staff, struck him, and shouted, "Get up and walk!"

It was easier to march than to be beaten. The man moved.

This was just the start. A woman stumbled, and her four-year-old son fell with her, still holding her hand. Morrow snatched the boy, and set him on his shoulder. He prodded the woman with his staff. "Get up! Get up! Move while it is cool!"

He stooped with his burden, caught her hand, and lifted her to her feet. She saw what he was carrying, and that gave her hope.

As they swung into the march, Morrow began to sing. They fell into the rhythm. Later, he began to count, "One—two—three—four—hup! Hup!" It made no sense to them, but the beat got them swinging. And they moved, dead on their feet—but they moved.

Jourdain carried on.

Morrow saw him, one hand on the pack saddle, his long frame swinging, his broad shoulders swinging. Morrow looked at the bitter cold stars, and shivered from the wind. First hours of fire, then hours of frost: this was the Syrian Desert. The boy on his shoulders was fast asleep, one arm locked about his neck.

Morrow called to the big Frenchman, "Sing something—" His voice failed. Jourdain turned, and laughed. "This is mirthful, I will sing, I will sing to the dead, none of them will make it."

"Sound off!"

Jourdain sounded off. The barroom ballad had a lilt, and Morrow quit hating his enemy.

Slowly, the stars wheeled overhead. Slowly, the hands of Morrow's watch

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dragged. But time could not stand entirely still. And by dint of marching, Morrow's muscles limbered up. He got his second wind.

False dawn glowed for a little while. The rocky knoll was nearer. The moon was setting. The line moved on, and no one dropped. Then there was new life in the air. Morrow tasted it in the chilly wind, and he heard Jourdain croak, "The long-ears, they smell water, they hurry!"

Shortly before true dawn, the phantom caravan stumbled through brush that crackled. Birds rose, wings drumming. Looking back toward Bagdad, Morrow saw the first murky red in the east.

The water hole; it was near now. He staggered to the head of the column, caught the donkey's halter, and said to Jourdain, "Round up the stragglers, don't let them fall out. I've got to dig for water."

"But we've got water. The skins aren't empty."

"Go back. Round them up. I have to dig. To show them I can find it. If they know that I can, they'll carry on. They've got to believe me. If they don't believe, they won't start again."

Jourdain went back.

Morrow beat the donkeys to a trot. Behind him, he heard Jourdain shouting, "*Allons! Allons!* We are here!"

MORROW found the moist sand under the ledge. He drew the headman's dagger and dug with the broad blade. He flung the curved steel aside, and clawed with his hands. The sand was wet now.

"Water!" he shouted. "Here it is, I told you it would be here."

Old Ali fell forward, rose to his knees, and dipped into the shallow hole. "Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds!"

The woman came stumbling to find her child. The boy was asleep on the sand. Morrow called to Jourdain, "Get brush! Make a fire! They believe now!"

Soon a blaze was crackling. There was a handful of coffee which Morrow had begged from Hamid. And there was meal for cakes of bread. A fire, and a well, and a drop of coffee: that put heart into the limping travelers.

Morrow stood there in the flickering light, and pointed at the water hole. "Look! Have I not fed you? Is there not water? Eat—sleep—only four more days. Four more days to Dimeskh-ash-Sham, only four days to the Pearl Set in Emeralds —only four days to Damascus!"

The pock-marked man droned, "*El hamdu lilahi, rabb il-alameen!*"

Morrow caught him under the arms, and lifted him to his feet. "Be the *imam,* and lead us in prayer."

So the old man rose, and the others lined up behind him.

Jourdain came and stood behind Morrow. "By God, they have done it. I've seen this hill. From a long way off. *Monsieur,* you were crazy to think it could be done. But here they are. How is it to the next stop?"

"It is easy to the next. This was the worst. The rest is bad, but it is easier."

"You have made me a nasty time of it," the Frenchman muttered. Then he thrust out his hand. "But you have done something tonight. Doubtless you do not believe it, but I did not know that a bit of sharp business would lead to this."

Morrow's face twisted in a weary grin. "I did not know either." He accepted the hand. "I still don't like you, but if I had been alone, I could not have kept these people together."

In the half light, they eyed each other. The praying Moslems bobbed up and down, and raised their voices to Allah. Then there was another sound; it made Morrow start, it made Jourdain drop his rival's hand. "Name of a little camel! What's that?"

It was an engine, far off. Morrow cocked his head. Just for a moment; then he said, "It's Corey, still running wild! He ought to be out of gas."

"But he isn't!" The drumming came nearer. Headlights pierced the shifting purple. "He's coming this way!"

The passengers heard the rumble, and ceased praying. The headlights snapped

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off, and for a moment Morrow could not pick out the approaching car. Then he saw the dark bulk, and caught the gleam of a radiator shell.

There could be only one car like that on the desert: Morrow knew it and Jourdain knew it. Tensely they waited and listened.

No mistaking that deep muffler note. She was throttling down, heading directly for the fire. Then a bump, the whine of brakes, the grinding of sand and rock. Lew Corey leaped from the wheel. "You crazy coot," he yelled. "It's lucky I saw your fire. My God, you walked all this way, with all this gang."

"Crazy—" Morrow bounded forward. "You're nuts. Lew—what the devil—"

He finished off with a splutter, becoming suddenly inarticulate.

Jourdain had retreated. Corey was saying, "I ditched the bus in a hollow and went back to the Well of the Moon. No passengers. They were talking about your chances of making it. I knew your game, sure I sounded nuts—that was part of *my* game, you big stiff—"

"Huh? *Your game?*"

"Sure. A build-up. To go out to where I was robbed. I tried it in Damascus until I saw the natives believed I was goofy. Then I grabbed our bus. And went out to look the field over. To hunt that mail pouch—hey—*what's that?*"

Morrow was unslinging the leather bag. "I got it. He came across. Damn it, I must have had your hunch, only a couple weeks late."

"So you got it?"

"Sure. Didn't you know that?"

Lew Corey shook his head. "No. When I heard you'd left the oasis, leading all these people on foot, I threw up the sponge. Whether you got it or not, I had to barge out and give you a lift. But you got it."

He snatched the pouch, and saw the lock and seals were intact. "Where's Jourdain?"

"With us." Morrow raised his hand. "He's paid his way. I had my hands full. He didn't know you'd go whacky—"

Lew interrupted indignantly.

"Listen, you big stiff, I'm not whacky, I never was. Get it straight, it was an act. And now we're riding."

Morrow turned, and in the early light he saw Jourdain leaning against the rocky ledge. "War's finished. Sign our bus over to us, and we'll say that we just found the mail. Is that a deal?"

Jourdain eyed Morrow, and he eyed Corey.

"If it is that that will end it, it is what you call the deal, *monsieur*. Doubtless there is business for both of us."

Corey grinned, nodded. "Doubtless there is, Pierre. But if it weren't for Morrow, I'd still knock your head off. I'm sick and tired of playing crazy."

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign

Of Tired Kidneys—How To Get Happy Relief

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.

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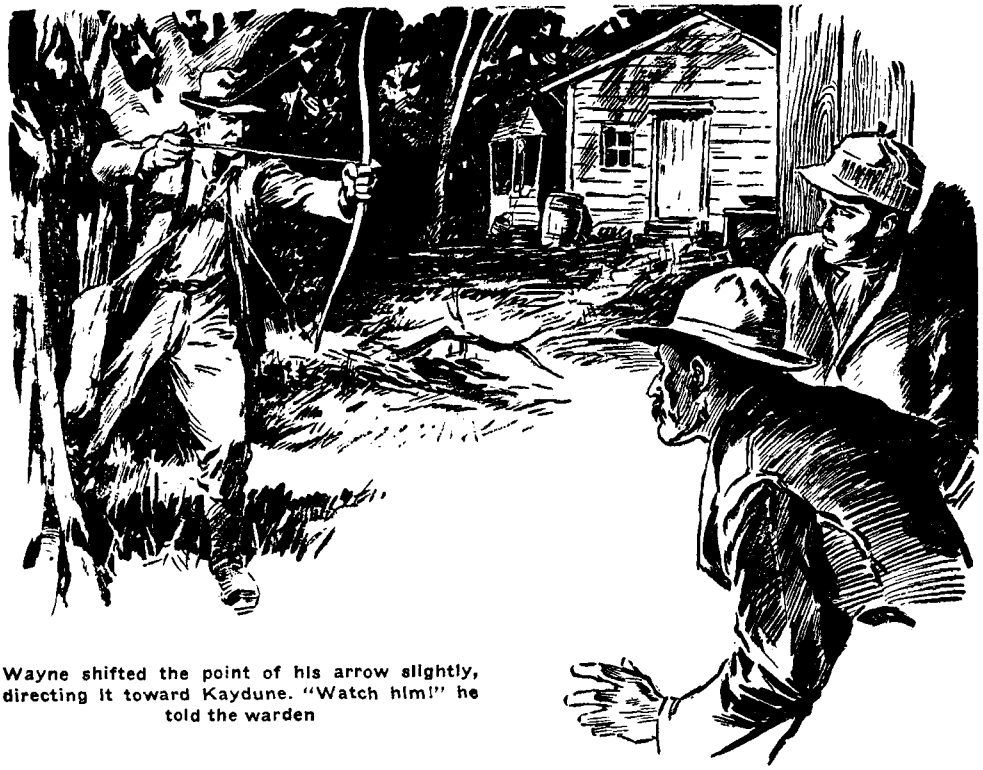

Wayne shifted the point of his arrow slightly, directing it toward Kaydune. "Watch him!" he told the warden

I Shot an Arrow

By JIM KJELGAARD

Author of "The Captains Pass," "Water Flows Down Hill," etc.

All his life Wayne McCloud had wanted a bow like the one the fat man carried. But there were other weapons to use, when they found Wayne's arrow in the fat man's neck

WAYNE McCLOUD was hunting because deer season opened tomorrow and, if he could get a couple of good bucks, he would be able to sell them at fancy prices to city hunters who got none of their own.

He was hunting with his bow because Lem Knowles, who had been Patten County game warden for twenty years, was perfectly aware that not only Wayne, but numerous other Dabbit Runners with the same bright idea would be afield, and Lem had the woods plastered with game wardens and deputies who would investigate every rifle shot they heard.

So far, up one ridge and down another, slinking through brush patches, and perched on likely runways, Wayne had hunted without any luck.

Nevertheless, he was enjoying himself. There was something about this kind of hunting, something in the taut string, the bent bow, and the feathered arrow, that produced a thrill he had never found in a gun. So, when twilight descended on Dabbit Run and he was still gameless, it

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was with a feeling that the day had not been entirely a loss that he started slowly home.

He was on Delby Hill, just over the Delby Hollow road, when he quit hunting, and that would be a good way to go home. Delby Hollow cut the Dabbit Run road only a little way above his house, and when he came to the junction he could cut through the brush and avoid any cars that might be on the Dabbit Run road. Few cars traveled Delby Hollow. There was only one camp in it, and tent campers usually sought more suitable spots.

His bow in his hand, and his quiver full of red-feathered arrows slapping against his thigh, he was scarcely a hundred feet down the road when, around a curve, he heard the whine of a car. Hastily he leaped to the side of the road and thrust his bow and arrows under some convenient brush.

The car came in sight. It was a low-hung affair, with the hood alone as long as most cars in Dabbit Run. Obviously, whoever owned it had money. The car stopped, a window was rolled down, and a pleasant voice spoke.

"Can you tell us where to find Bryan's cottage?"

Wayne approached the car from the driver's side, and came face to face with a strong-featured, friendly-eyed man of about forty-five. He was dressed in hunting clothes, and looked like a hunter instead of an over-dressed dude who fancied himself a combination of Buffalo Bill and Geronimo.

Beside him sat a little fat man with tired eyes. There were three others in the back seat, one of whom fairly glowed in a bright scarlet hunting jacket.

"Bryan's camp's just up the road a bit," Wayne said. "She sits in the first holler to the left. You can't miss it."

His eyes roved the car. It contained no guns, but several long cases were thrust in the coat rack on the back seat.

"Where's your guns?" he asked.

The driver smiled. "We're using bows and arrows."

WAYNE placed his foot on the running board while a little tingle of pleasure traveled up his spine. Almost anyone could knock a deer down with a gun, provided he got within shooting range; but it took a hunter to get one with a bow and arrow.

"I shoot a bow myself," he said.

"Indeed?"

The disdainful snort came from the young man in the scarlet jacket. Ignoring him, the driver settled his arm on the open window.

"What kind of bow you got?"

Wayne scratched his ear. "It ain't no great shucks. It draws about eighty pounds, an' I made it myself. But it works."

"Can I see it?" the driver asked.

Wayne looked from the brush where his bow lay hidden to the car, and back again. The car had an out-of-state license; certainly they weren't wardens. And, if in the coming winter any dead deer with arrows sticking in them were found in Dabbit Run, none in the car could point out Wayne as the killer because they would be gone when deer season ended. Wayne went to the brush and got his bow.

"I keep it hid sometimes," he remarked.

The driver, who could guess why a native Dabbit Runner might want to hide his weapons, said nothing. He took the bow in his hands, strung it, drew the string back, and looked at Wayne.

"Mind if I shoot it?" he asked.

"Help yourself."

Wayne handed him an arrow from his quiver.

The driver nocked it and looked around for a mark. Forty yards away, across the road, was a towering beech tree with a small bit of fungus, about the size of a half dollar, growing six feet up on the trunk. The driver lifted the bow to his shoulder, drew the arrow back to its point, and released it. The string twanged, and the arrow sped through the air to bury itself to the shaft four inches above the fungus.

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"That's shootin'!" Wayne exclaimed.

Carrying a cased bow, the fat man got out of the car.

"Mac puts 'em where he wants 'em," he grunted. "Think you can do as well, young feller?"

"I dunno." Wayne grinned.

The fat man stripped the case off the bow. Wayne gasped. It was a beautiful weapon, perfectly bowed so that there was exactly the same draw on each end. It was backed with polished rawhide and had an oiled leather grip. Wayne let his eyes play over it longingly, and sighed.

Often he had dreamed of owning a bow like that. But it had probably cost upwards of a hundred dollars, and nobody who made his living in Dabbit Run could ever afford to spend that much for a bow.

The fat man strung the bow and put it in Wayne's hand. He extended an arrow with a steel hunting point.

"Let's see you beat Mac's shot," he said. "He won't quit crowing until he finds there's somebody else might have taken the three championships he got last year."

Wayne balanced the bow in his hands and nocked the arrow. He raised the bow and shot. The arrow split the fungus in half and buried itself in the tree.

The fat man chortled. "Mac, you met your Waterloo!"

The driver wrung Wayne's hand. "That's as fine a shot as I ever saw! Buddy, do you know this country pretty well?"

"Pretty well," Wayne said.

"You working?"

"No."

"Then how would you like to guide for us? I'm Mac Weatherby. Mac will do."

"I'm William Clinton Doane," the fat man said. "But you can call me Fat."

"I'm Bardson," somebody from the car chirped. "Bud's the handle."

"I'm Langer," another said. "Mike's my real name."

"I'm Mr. Kaydune."

Wayne stood still. He couldn't explain why, but he had a suspicion that the callow person in the red jacket who called himself Mr. Kaydune was not what he seemed. Wayne searched his memory for a parallel. A skunk—no. A weasel—hardly.

Ah, that was it! A sheep-killing dog in with a pack, and holding himself higher and mightier than all the rest!

"I'm Wayne McCloud," he said. "Call me Wayne, and I'll be up with the crack of light in the morning."

IT WAS still dark when Wayne walked up the Delby Hollow road the next morning. He stopped by the beech tree they had used for a mark; good hunting arrows weren't so easy to make that he could afford to throw any away. But especially he wanted the steel-tipped arrow Fat Doane had given him. That had his own home-made arrows beaten by a mile.

The tree was a ghostly shape in the darkness, and the fungus on it shone palely. Wayne reached up to find the broadhead still imbedded in the trunk. But, when he felt for his own arrow, it wasn't there. Puzzled, he struck a match and looked at the place where it had been. Somebody had worked his arrow out just as he had taken the other.

Wayne shrugged. Any Dabbit Runner might have taken it. But why hadn't they taken the broadhead, a much better arrow, too? Besides, how had they seen either arrow in the dark? There had been no one on the Delby Hollow road last night. Oh well—the broadhead more than replaced his arrow.

He thrust it into the quiver and continued on to where a light shone through the windows of the small log cottage known locally as Bryan's camp. Wayne pushed the door open.

"You might at least knock!"

The irritable remark came from Mr. Kaydune. Wearing his scarlet jacket, he was leaning against the wall. The breast pocket of the jacket was firmly outlined, protruding three-eighths of an inch. Mr. Kaydune pulled a carved gold cigar-

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ette case from it, took out a cigarette, and put the case back in his pocket.

Wayne glowered at him. If he should decide to shove this young squirrel back into the hole from which he was always poking his head—

"Can it, can it, kid," Mac Weatherby came in from the kitchen. "Hello, Wayne. Come on in. We're just polishing up a few flapjacks."

Wayne followed him into the kitchen. Bardson and Langer sat at the table, busy eating pancakes and bacon. Fat Doane was in an arm chair, scraping the syrup from his plate with his knife. He put the plate down and looked at Wayne, rubbing his hands briskly.

"Hello, nimrod," he said affably. "You all set to lead us amateur Dan'l Boones to the slaughter?"

"Yeh."

Doane tried to lift himself from the chair, and fell back. A spasm of pain distorted his face. He tried again, and got up to walk to a pile of hunting jackets from which he sorted his own.

"You and me will show these sissies how to hunt," he said assuredly. "Lead on, Macduff."

Over the heads of the seated men Wayne caught the eye of Mac Weatherby, standing in the doorway. Mac winked, and inclined his head sideways. Carelessly Wayne sauntered from the kitchen to find him leaning against the car.

"I DON'T want to cramp your hunting style," Mac said. "But I'm worried about Fat. He has heart trouble, even has to sleep sitting up in a chair. At the most he has six months to live. This is going to be his last hunt and he knows it. All summer he's been praying that he'd live to take it.

"Without letting on to him, could you take us some place where it isn't too hard walking, and where he can get on a good runway without too much work? He'll down a buck if one comes by, and I'll appreciate it any amount if he gets to see one."

"We'll go down to Crampon," Wayne said. "There's a runway through a swamp not twenty feet from the road. I think I can put a buck through."

"Swell if you can do it."

"I can. But look here, Mac. I hired out as your guide. But if that guy in the fancy jacket don't quit his funny remarks, he's pretty likely to get his face bashed in. I don't stand for nothin' like that from nobody."

Mac shrugged. "If Kaydune has an accident and gets a black eye, that's his tough luck. He's a spoiled brat whose old man died and instead of leaving him the million he expected, didn't leave a cent. Langer brought him along."

Mac went back to the camp, pushed the door open.

"You armchair hunters going to chew the rag all day?" he called. "It's getting daylight."

Wayne clenched his hands. There was still a lot about Kaydune that hadn't been explained away. Wayne thought more strongly than ever of a sheep-killing dog trying to look innocent. Oh well, possibly he was just imagining things. But of one thing he was sure.

Kaydune would bear watching and a lot of it.

Carrying their bows, quivers at their hips, the hunters emerged from the cabin. They climbed into the car, Wayne getting in the front seat with Mac Weatherby and Fat Doane. A light flickered in the windshield: Kaydune again getting a smoke from his fancy cigarette case. Without offering any to Wayne, he passed it around the car. Fat Doane thrust his hand in his pocket and gave Wayne a fat cigar. Then—

"Oh hell!" The groan came from Fat.

"What's the matter?" Mac asked.

"I ain't got any eating tobacco!"

"Wow! Our fat pal on a deer hunt without a quid in his cheek—it's hard to imagine. Know any place where we can get him a pack of chewin', Wayne? Any kind will do, as long as it's good and juicy."

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"Drive down to Biggers Corners," Wayne said. "We can get it at Birden's. He'll have hunters staying with him, an' will be up."

They drew up in front of the hotel at Bigger's Corners. Wayne got out.

"Wait a minute." Fat Doane fumbled in his trousers pocket and drew out a flat steel case, about four inches by three. He pressed a lock and it flew open to reveal a wad of bills. Wayne gasped. There were several fives. The rest were thousands!

Wayne, a five-dollar bill in his hand, was halfway up the steps leading to the hotel when he heard the angry voice of Kaydune.

"You shouldn't show that much money to that hillbilly. He'd probably cut anybody's throat for five dollars."

"Ah foosh!" Fat scoffed. "I should stay home from a deer hunt just because some nitwit has to bring me money after banking hours. Wayne's all right."

Without seeming to have heard, Wayne continued on into the hotel and bought three sacks of chewing tobacco.

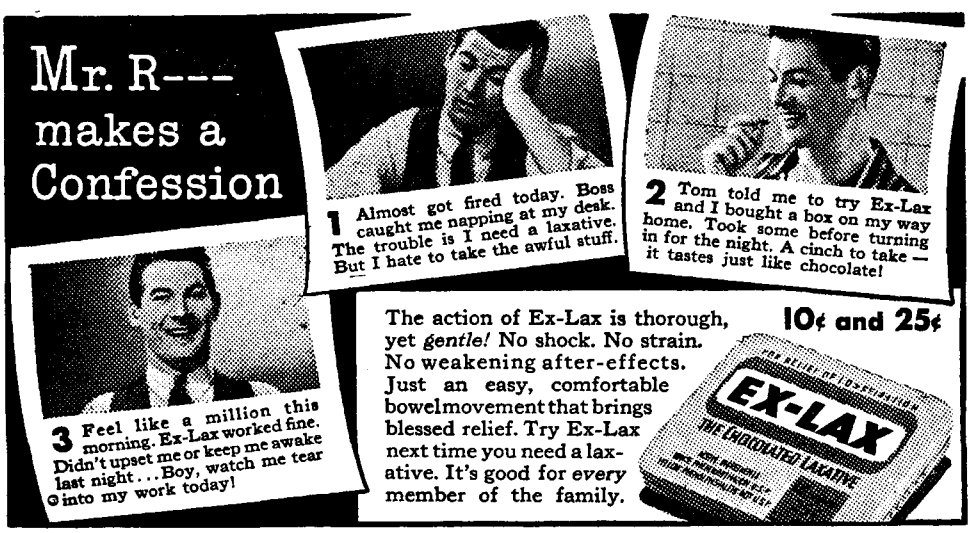
DAYLIGHT was well under way when they got to Crampon, which was a series of low ridges set among higher ones. There were always plenty of hunters there because the ridges were easy to climb. But there were also a lot of deer. If you knew the runways and how to drive them, you could go in the Crampon and come out with game.

Wayne led from the road up one of the ridges. Twenty feet from the road, in a thicket of little hemlocks, he stopped. There was a faint, almost indistinguishable trail there. Weatherby looked at it and nodded tacit approval, but the rest were uninterested. Weatherby knew that the biggest and wariest bucks seldom followed well-marked game trails, but usually made their own. And those trails were generally where no one would expect a deer to run.

"You stay here, Fat," Wayne whispered.

Fat Doane brought his hand up in a snappy military salute, stuffed his mouth full of chewing tobacco, and stepped behind a tree. Wayne led the rest up the side hill, posting them at various runways and leaving the last man on top.

Then he made a wide circle, going down the opposite side of the ridge and following it a long way. He cut back to the side the hunters were posted on and began to beat through the brush, driving the deer ahead of him.


Mr. R--- makes a Confession
1 Almost got fired today. Boss caught me napping at my desk. The trouble is I need a laxative. But I hate to take the awful stuff.
2 Tom told me to try Ex-Lax and I bought a box on my way home. Took some before turning in for the night. A cinch to take — it tastes just like chocolate!
3 Feel like a million this morning. Ex-Lax worked fine. Didn't upset me or keep me awake last night... Boy, watch me tear into my work today!
The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowelmovement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.
10¢ and 25¢
EX-LAX
THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

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After a half hour he came to Langer, standing behind a tree with an arrow nocked in his bow. Wayne looked at him questioningly. Langer shook his head.

"Saw two does and nothing else."

Wayne climbed to the top to get Bardson and Weatherby, neither of whom had seen any game, and with them in tow started back down. The runway where he had left Kaydune behind a hollow stump was empty.

A slow anger flared in Wayne: leaving a runway while a drive was going on was the deadliest of hunter's sins. He noticed in passing that a strip a foot long had been ripped from the stump, and the end broken off. The leaves were scuffed and brushed more than they should have been.

Wayne led on down to where Fat Doane, his face wreathed in smiles, stood over a huge buck that had two arrows buried to the feathers in its chest. It was easy to see that Fat's last hunt had been all he'd hoped for.

The three stood around kidding Fat, who beamed radiantly down on Wayne as he dressed the buck. Wayne finished, wiped his knife on the leaves, and thrust it into his sheath.

"Where's Kaydune?" he asked.

"Oh, he come down," Fat Doane said. "He said he was going to the car and have a smoke—the silly ass!"

Wayne dragged the buck the few feet to the car and saw Kaydune sitting on the running board, looking in bored uninterest at the ground. He took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and put one in his mouth Wayne looked at him.

LEAVING Fat happily asleep in the back of the car, they hunted without success until noon. Then Mac Weatherby said:

"I hate to bust things up. But I don't like to leave Fat sitting. Mind if we go now, Wayne? Tomorrow we'll hunt all day; Fat won't want to go out again. I'll run you down to your house."

"Go ahead," Wayne said. "I'll hunt the ridges until dark and walk home. I'll be up at daylight."

For the first time Kaydune was amiable.

"If you walk home, what time will you get there?"

"Mebbe eight or nine o'clock."

. . . A little past eight that night, Wayne trod a cautious way from the woods on Duck Mountain toward his house. He trod cautiously because deer frequently played in his fields; and if he saw one in the starlit night he would take a shot at it.

A hundred feet from the door, he stopped and stared steadily at the house. Some sixth sense that years of hunting and poaching had instilled in him was voicing a warning.

A step at a time he continued, and was within twenty paces of the house when, dimly, he made out the forms of two men crouching behind the woodshed watching the door. Wayne nocked an arrow, and drew it back.

"If either of you move," he said calmly, "I'll shiver your innards for you."

"Who's that?"

The voice was that of Lem Knowles, the Patten County game warden, who also acted as general peace officer. The arrow still nocked, Wayne advanced. Wherever Lem was, there was also trouble for somebody. Lem backed up against the woodshed. Wayne saw his hand creep down toward his gun.

"That's the one!" Wayne recognized the heated tones and scarlet jacket of young Kaydune. "Get him!"

"Shut up," Lem said. His eyes dwelt cynically on the bow and arrow. "No wonder we haven't been hearing you shoot lately, Wayne. But that stick got you in trouble. You got any logical explanations? Does anybody besides you know exactly where you was at quarter of five this afternoon?"

"Why?"

"I suppose you didn't come up to camp while we were hunting, shoot Fat Doane through the window, and take his ten thousand dollars," Kaydune sneered.

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"Now you come sneaking in to get your stuff so you can make a getaway."

"Careful there, sonny," Wayne said.

"What you aim to do about it?" Lem asked.

Wayne shifted the point of his arrow slightly, directing it at Kaydune. "I aim to show you a sheep-killin' dog," he said. "Don't let that Kaydune get out of your sight!"

"What the hell do you mean?" Kaydune snarled; and Lem Knowles looked at Wayne questioningly.

"He knows what I mean," Wayne told the warden. S'pose we go up to Bryan's an' prove it. Put up that gun an' let's go peaceable."

"Okay," Lem Knowles agreed. "But for the present I'm watchin' you both."

WEATHERBY, Bardson, and Langer were sitting nervously on chairs in the main room when Wayne and Lem got there with Kaydune. Weatherby's eyes were twin chunks of icy granite. Langer got up and walked out of the room; Bardson looked away. On the couch was a blanket-covered figure.

"I trusted you, McCloud," Weatherby said shortly.

"Maybe you will again," Wayne said. "Right now I wanna hear exactly what happened."

"Tell him," Weatherby nodded at Kaydune.

"We got home at quarter of one and had some lunch," Kaydune said. "Fat was tired, and said he'd sit in his chair while the rest of us hunted. We went out at quarter after one and hunted until four when I left the party and came back. I got here at exactly quarter of five, and saw McCloud running into the woods. I hurried, and when I came down there was an arrow through Fat's neck, pinning him to the chair.

"I waited until the rest came back. They all went into the woods to see if they could catch McCloud. I went right down to get an officer, and found Mr. Knowles. We found McCloud sneaking into his house and brought him back. I think McCloud was just going in to get his arrow when I scared him away."

"Is that right?" Lem Knowles asked Wayne.

"Le's see the arrow that killed him," Wayne said.

Weatherby walked over and lifted the blanket. Fat Doane lay on his side, one of Wayne's hunting arrows through his neck.

"That's yours," Weatherby said.

"Yeh, it's mine," Wayne agreed. "But you remember the arrow you shot into the tree? That's the one."

"A likely story," Kaydune sneered.

"Oh shut up or I'll smack you one!" Wayne snapped. "What do you think of it, Lem?"

Lem Knowles shook his head. "I never suspicioned you'd go killing people without good reasons. But it looks bad."

"Mebbe so. But I didn't kill him. And I can prove it."

"How?" Weatherby asked.

"What size bows do you shoot?"

"Mine draws seventy pounds. Fat's was a fifty-five pounder. Bardson, Langer, and Kaydune shoot thirty-eight pounders."

"Bring Fat's buck in," Wayne said.

"Why?"

"I aim to do some provin'."

Lem Knowles and Weatherby went outside and came in lugging the dead buck.

"Lay it on the chair," Wayne directed. "Have its neck about where Fat's was."

Puzzled, the two laid the buck on the chair. Wayne stepped back to the window, his bow in his hands and an arrow loosely nocked in it.

"His neck at the throat is about as thick as a man's," Wayne said. "This bow is an eighty pounder. I'm goin' to show you that an arrow shot from this bow will pass right through both the deer an' the chair. Don't stand behind it."

"That won't prove—" Weatherby started.

Wayne drew the arrow back, released

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it. It flicked forward to make a clean hole through the buck's neck, come out the back of the chair, and bury itself in the farther wall of the cabin. Wayne stepped calmly forward to pick up a thirty-eight-pound bow.

"That still won't prove a thing," Weatherby objected. "I—"

"An arrow shot from this bow should pin that buck's neck to the chair without goin' through," Wayne cut in. "As I was sayin'—"

HE DREW the arrow back, aimed at the buck—then in one sweeping motion turned so that it was trained exactly on the breast pocket of Kaydune's hunting jacket. Lem Knowles yelled. Weatherby made a half leap forward.

Wayne released the arrow; it struck with a sharp thud and bounded back. At the same time he hurled himself forward to bring Kaydune to the ground. His hand found the pocket of the jacket and ripped it off to reveal Fat Doane's steel money case.

Sweating, he got to his feet and gave the case to Weatherby.

"As I was sayin'," he continued calmly, "if he had that cigarette case there, he'd be a goner now because the arrow would have gone through it into him—not that it would be much loss. But the arrow wouldn't go through steel. Fat was kilt with a light bow, an' Kaydune shot it."

Weatherby looked at him, the old friendly light back in his eyes. Lem Knowles and Langer stepped forward to grasp either arm of Kaydune.

"How did you know?" Weatherby asked.

Wayne shrugged. "It wan't hard. Kaydune was smokin' cigarettes out of that fancy case of his. When he left the deer stand, I saw him take one out of a paper package. But he'd busted a hunk of wood off the hollow stump he stood behind, an' stuck that in his pocket to make it look like he still had the case.

"Right now it looked like he had the case too. But I knowed he had Fat's money because when you left Crampon I went back an' looked in the hollow stump he stood behind. He'd throwed the case down it an' covered it up with leaves where I s'pose he thought nobody could find it.

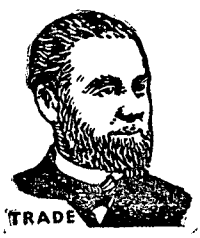
"Well, if you don't want me any more, I'll be joggin' along. Reckon you won't need a guide any more either?"

"Reckon we won't," Mac said soberly. "But wait a minute."

He went to the corner and picked up Fat Doane's bow and quiver full of arrows.

"Fat set a heap of store by these," he said. "I know he would feel better about it if he knew they were in the hands of somebody who could appreciate 'em. Take 'em along, Wayne."

DON'T BARK



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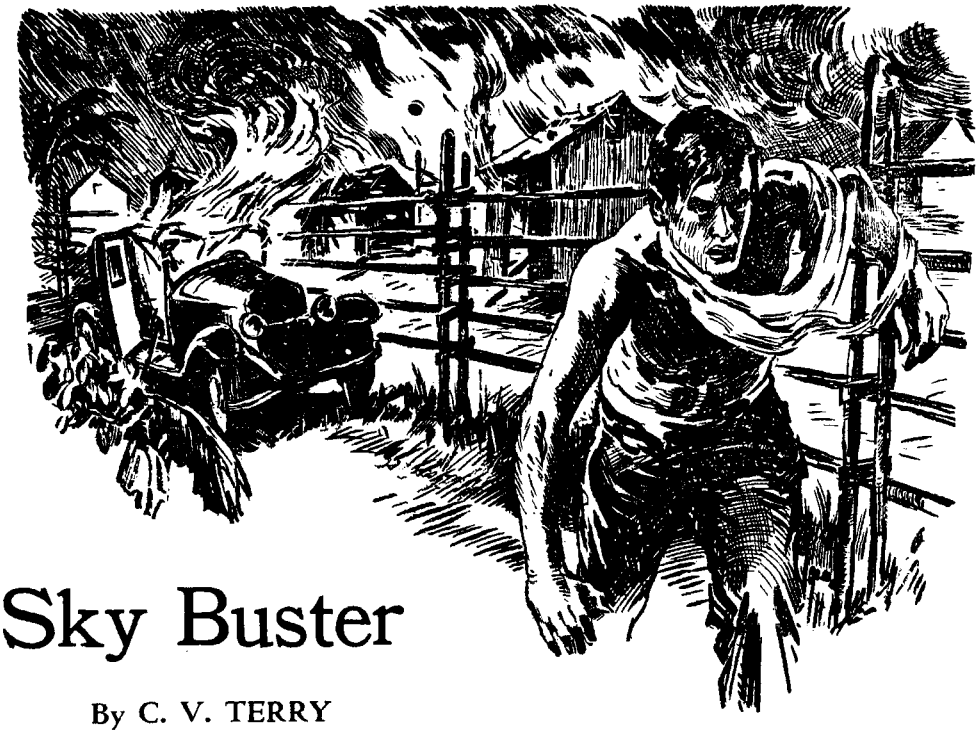

Sky Buster

By C. V. TERRY

Fly 'em, cowboy! Fly low and silently, you gold-plated cattleman; and down there in the Florida palmettoes you'll see a hand touch off a holocaust

I

IT ISN'T like your dad to pass the buck." It was said without anger, in a reflective sort of tone.

"It isn't like you to stall, Uncle Jed. When do I start work for you—and where?"

Jed Conklin took a thoughtful turn of his office before he whirled on the young man in the armchair. Tom Strang lounged there lightly, with the deceptive indolence of a greyhound. He had that same grace, the same air of tight-coiled engery. When you looked twice, you saw he was tall and wind-weathered, and his gray, wide-spaced eyes seemed oddly mature. Once they had met yours, it was hard to believe that Tom had been an All-American end at New Haven a scant two years ago.

Conklin paused for breath. Evidently, he was making a conscious effort to choose his words. The young man in the armchair made a mental note of that. . . . And yet, Flordia has agreed with my avuncular relative, he thought. What's more, he has the tan to prove he's been leading a healthy outdoor life. A tycoon, finished in mahogany. Nothing upsets the type more than a personal problem it can't turn over to its secretaries. . . . Thoughts like these were excusable in Tom. Jed Conklin was his uncle by marriage; they had disliked each other strenuously, ever since Tom had graduated from the nursery.

"The point is, my boy, I hate using the ranch as a—a punishment cell. Especially when you are the prisoner."

Tom looked grieved. "Must we waste time, pretending to be friendly?"

Jed Conklin smiled coldly, and sat down behind his desk. "Of course, if you take that attitude—"

"In the first place, I'm not being pun-

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ished. After all, I am a bit old for that."

"You tried to go to Canada and enlist."

"Exactly. I had one foot over the border, when Dad's strong-arm squad brought me home by force." Tom looked down at a pair of skinned knuckles, and smiled. "That was quite a war in itself, while it lasted."

"And now, your father sends you a thousand miles south—to me."

"I flew down here to you, because I promised him to be good—for awhile, at least. Three hours from La Guardia Field to Jacksonville, Florida. Think of it, Uncle Jed—a minor miracle. Surely you've some use for a cowboy with wings."

Conklin shuffled the papers on his desk, with the air of a man who has lost interest long ago. "I gather you had quite a heart-to-heart talk with your father, Tom."

"One of those mutual-confession hours that got us both nowhere. Dad's a grand guy, you know: I'll hang one on any man who tries to tell me different."

Conklin looked up briefly. "For a college graduate, your grammar is atrocious."

"Sorry, Uncle Jed—my talents have always run to motors. Dad pointed out the fact that, as his only heir, it was high time I buckled down to *something*. I said I'd planned to buckle down in earnest, when I headed for Canada: asked him point-blank if I could do anything more useful these days than drop bombs for the British."

TOM paused, hearing his voice echo hollowly in the big, immaculate office. Beyond the venetian blinds at the windows of Jacksonville's infant skyscraper, the spring sunshine was hot and tranquil. Tom stared down for awhile, from those twenty proud stories, at the serene blue reach of the St. John's estuary. He could see his Vultee amphibian riding at anchor in the yacht basin on the far bank, its chromium wingtips winking in the brassy glare of the Florida noon.

"I said I didn't want to inherit a couple of Texas counties—to say nothing of this shebang—unless I could run them without interference from Berlin. Dad suggested that I leave that headache to Congress, for the present. Naturally, I said; in fact, I was quite willing. At the same time, I wanted to do my bit for defense *now*. Before the boys in Washington stopped talking." Tom smiled wryly. "At that point in the discussion, Dad and I made our deal."

"Well?"

"I promised to stay away from recruiting offices until July. In the meantime, I agreed to go to work for you—at any job you assigned me. At the end of four months—and provided you sent up a good report on me—Dad promised to underwrite any argosy I cared to start, from Britain to Borneo." Tom smiled again. "Naturally, he considers it a perfectly safe bargain. That is, he thinks you can break my roving spirit if anyone can."

Conklin tossed down his papers. "The compliment is accepted. Where shall I begin?"

"Don't stall, Uncle Jed. You know you have a telegram on that desk, with full instructions."

"Quite right," said Conklin. "But you see, I'm only the titular head of this enterprise. The DeLeon Turpentine and Cattle Company is controlled by Strang Inc."

"Are you complaining?"

"I'm pointing out my dependence on your father's wishes. You must admit his wire is a bit vague."

Conklin tossed a Western Union blank across the desk. Tom read the message carefully.

SON AND HEIR FLYING DOWN TO YOU TODAY SEEKING EMPLOYMENT. BOIL HIM UNTIL HE COMES OUT HARD AND DONT STOP
ADAM STRANG

"Perhaps I've misjudged Dad," said Tom. "Judging by that wire, he at least believes in building my character."

JED CONKLIN exploded into action again, quartering his office in a burst of turkey-red rage. "Whether you're machined-gunned in Europe, or flunk out as a Florida cowboy, is a matter of no interest to me. The conduct of this business is another story. How can I find a place here for a spoiled playboy of twenty-one?"

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"Twenty-three, if you don't mind. And I'd suggest a moratorium on epithets, here and now."

"What d'you expect? A foreman's job at the still? That turpentine gang would cut your heart out for breakfast. Or suppose I send you down to the ranch. Four months in the scrub, without a drink or a barber. How long would you last in that sort of frying pan, Tom?"

"I rode herd for three summers in Texas, and did a fair job."

"Of course you did. On a hand-tailored ranch, with a foreman to cinch your pony each morning, and a beauty-rest mattress at sundown. . . . A Florida ranch is a bit different from that, Tom. Or perhaps you didn't know we had ranches here in Florida?"

"Keep right on, Uncle Jed. I can see you're enjoying this."

"I've put in a good twelve years at this desk, building up your father's Southern holdings. When the landboom caved in here, we bought up twenty thousand acres in St. Lucie and Okeechobee counties—mostly at sheriff's foreclosures. Worthless land, you know, to anyone but a well-knit corporation. Pine-barrens and scrub, the sort of thing not even the CCC could improve. But it could be fenced, stocked with short-horns, and used for grazing. I won't tell you how many head we've brought out of there since—I can see you're bored now."

"No, Uncle. Merely protective coloring, until you've made your point."

"There's no range to speak of—just cow-paths through the palmettoes. The bunk-house, so called, is a flea-trap on the Caloosahatchee, ten miles from a road. Our boys don't wear chaps when they ride herd on that job—jeans and a sombrero are about all you can bear after sunup. You'd appreciate that better, Tom, if you ever hunted a stray yearling all afternoon in a mangrove swamp."

"Thanks," murmured Tom. "You've already made Dad's point nicely." He stretched out his long legs, and smiled candidly. "When do I start?"

Conklin considered the telegram a long moment, before he answered. "Suppose I refuse to employ you at all?"

"Dad would fire you on the spot," said Tom. "You know that as well as I."

"So we understand each other's problem perfectly."

"Be a sport, Uncle; do your damnedest to break me. You know you'll enjoy it."

"I'd hardly enjoy shipping you back to your father on ice."

TOM sat quietly, letting the silence grow like a wall between them. "Dad said there'd been some trouble on the land," he said, at length. "Something about the other breeders taking reprisals, because all that fencing had cut them off from water."

"I was the first breeder to run out barbed wire in that part of Florida," said Conklin proudly. "The first damned Yankee to move into that sun-bitten scrub, and come out with a profit for Strang, Inc.

"Not that you'd appreciate that, either. It's been a lonely, hardscrabble job and I was the man to swing it. Even though it meant fire-patrols, spring and fall, when those crackers tried to burn us out. To say nothing of a fence-gang, working day and night to stop wire-cutting."

"Couldn't I serve as a fireman?"

"You wouldn't be the first to stop a bullet," said Conklin.

"Come off it, Uncle. Do you think I scare that easily?"

Conklin spoke evenly. "When those short-horns reach their growth, we ship them out of that range, whole on the hoof—to Texas. To fatten for the market, on real grazing land. My cowhands aren't so fortunate, Tom. They must herd the stock to the tick-baths each spring, and round up the calves for branding, and dose with quinine against malaria until their ears ring. They must stand watch along my fences, trade potshots in the dark—"

"You're repeating yourself, Uncle," said Tom. "When do I start?"

Conklin slapped the desk with his palm. "Report to my foreman, at the Osceola City freight yards on Monday."

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"And where is Osceola City?"

"A bay-head on the lake, serviced by a Seaboard freight-spur. Whoever called it a city had a perverted sense of humor. We've a company store there, and a few work buildings. In fact, a goods train is going out this noon, from the freight yards here. You can hitch a free ride, if you hurry."

Tom glanced out the window, at the amphibian riding easily at anchorage across the St. John's. "Thanks, Uncle, I still have my wings."

"Don't tell me you expect to ride herd in *that?*"

"The body is yours, from Monday on. Until then, do you mind if I air my soul a little?"

But Conklin was deep in his papers now, ignoring his nephew. "My foreman's name is Masters—remember that."

"Are you making a play on words?"

"You'll find out," said Conklin.

II

TOM charged out into the sunlit bustle of Bay Street with his chin high and spirits intact. Trading punches with an employer before the battle was joined—well, that was a typical exhibit of the Strang temperament in action.

Admitting that the next move was Uncle Jed's, he had emerged with colors flying. Furthermore, he had handled the disposition of his plane neatly. That amphibian was essential to a plan already half-formed in his mind.

Adam Strang's son and heir strode briskly along the curb, with both eyes on the flawless zenith—and crashed head-on into something soft, yielding, and fluffy. Something that reeled from the curb under the impact of a shoulder that had been good for touchdowns, once.

He came back to earth with a pleasant bump and whipped both arms around the girl's waist, in ample time to snatch her back from the path of the bus roaring down Bay Street to the bridge.

"Do you do that often?"

"So sorry. I was checking the ceiling."

"I'm sure that's right interesting. In the meantime, I've missed my bus."

Her voice was richly flavored with the slow cadences of the South—an accent that seemed a part of her. Tom Strang dropped his arm reluctantly, as the girl stepped back to the sidewalk and straightened her hat. When he got his first real glimpse of her face, he swallowed hard. Deep-tanned, and innocent of makeup under the wide-brimmed straw, it was a face to make any Yale man's heart turn over—even an All-American's. Tom put his fingers to his lips instinctively and whistled for a taxi.

"Not with ten cents in my purse," said the girl.

"Won't you let me make amends?"

A taxi was already nosing out of traffic to the curb. The girl gave Tom a long, slow look, then got in without comment as he opened the door.

"South Jacksonville yards, and hurry. I've a train to make."

" 'At'll cost a buck, lady. Ah ain't supposed t'leave mah beat in town."

Tom jumped in after the girl, and slammed the door. "It's worth two, if you deliver this lady on time."

The girl took off her wide-brimmed straw sailor hat, shook out clubbed blond curls that had never known a beauty parlor's iron, and spoke quite calmly. "I don't do this often either, you know."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You're Tom Strang, aren't you?"

"Who told you?"

"The rotogravures, these many years. Funny—you're the first man I ever met who lived up to his pictures."

"Sorry I can't return the compliment. I'm sure no camera would do you justice."

"Don't feed me sugar, please. This is a pickup with a purpose. I'm Caroline Masters. Does that name ring any bells?"

"A few faint ones. Go on, please."

"I CAME up from Osceola City on the goods train; going back this noon, with the freight." Caroline Masters regarded Tom unsmilingly. "I came across the bridge this morning on purpose to

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waylay you, and lost my nerve. Then I waited in the lobby, until you came out of Mr. Conklin's office."

She smiled faintly, now; it was a smile well worth waiting for. " 'Course, it was easy then—you walking along, with your eyes on the sky—"

"Look here, Miss Masters—"

"*Mrs.* Masters. I'm your foreman's wife."

Tom blinked. Even in that merciless noon light, she did not look a day over seventeen. "So you bumped me on purpose?"

"Uh-huh. Should I apologize?"

"How did you know I'd be joining the outfit? Uncle Jed only gave me the job a moment ago."

"He'd planned to send you down to us all along. Only yesterday, he told Bert that your father had called him up 'specially—"

The taxi took the bridge with a screech of brake-bands. Tom leaned back in his corner with a sigh. "The old varmint. Giving me that song-and-dance, when he had his orders from Dad all along. But why are *you* so interested—Mrs. Masters?"

"Can't a lady be curious, Mr. Strang?"

"Not without a reason."

"You're the reason. Maybe you never lived in a place like Osceola City. Maybe you don't know how it feels, knowin' a stranger is headed your way." This time, she really smiled. Tom Strang felt his heart do a back-somersault, right itself shakily. "Even if he is a damyankee, with an airship all his own."

"Am I being ribbed, by any chance?"

"You asked me, didn't you? One thing about me, I'm never less than frank." They were smiling at each other now, almost like old friends. Tom Strang hesitated, fumbling for a phrase.

"But Osceola City—isn't it just the end of a freight spur?"

"Company store, three agents' bungalows, and twelve freight sheds."

"You mean you *live* there?"

"Bert has to have a home, when he comes off the range."

Tom settled back in his corner again, with several questions still unanswered. There was an odd coolness between them now, almost as though a subject had been mentioned out of turn. The taxi came down from the bridge-ramp wide open, and took a left turn along the water front on the right bank of the St. John's, skirting the yacht basin. Caroline Masters glanced briefly toward the Vultee amphibian bobbing in the anchorage beyond.

"So that's it?"

"I see you know everything about me."

"It's a small world down here. You'll get used to that, in time." Something in her eyes brought him out of his corner again. "I even know how much you love to fly: Mr. Conklin was very witty on that subject with Bert and me yesterday."

"Suppose I take you down to Osceola City now. We can beat the railroad by a day, at least."

The girl faced him, quite seriously. "Sorry, I'll be needed in the caboose."

THE taxi was bumping across the sidings in the freight yards now, braking sharply to let a switching engine wheeze by with a string of empty gondolas. The goods train stood beyond, just off the right-of-way: three streamlined cattle-cars, with *Strang, Inc.* inscribed on their sides, a facsimile of a signature famous 'round the world.

Caroline Masters spoke out of another taut silence. "Does it make you proud, belonging to that dynasty?"

"Oddly enough, yes. Perhaps you don't know this, but Dad's clearing beef for England these days, fast as he can ship. Cutting red tape in all directions, even if he has to sell under cost. Yes, Mrs. Masters, it does things to me, seeing that name on a cattle-car. It even makes me pause and ask myself a question. Are there better ways to fight injustice than dropping bombs? Even when injustice has a big headstart?"

"Are you talking to me, or thinking aloud?"

"Both, I'm afraid. It's just occurred to me that there's no crime in being rich, if you make proper use of it."

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The taxi bumped across the cleared siding, as a whistle wailed down the long line of freight waiting at the right-of-way.

"Hurry, please! They're pulling out!"

Tom wrenched open the cab door, and ran with Caroline Masters along the slowly moving line of cars. "Don't tell me they'd start without you?"

"What's a mere wife when stores are moving south?"

The freight eased to a stop with a clash of couplings, moved in earnest as the wheels of the locomotive bit into high iron a quarter mile ahead. A tall ox of a man leaned down from the caboose, lifting Caroline to the platform beside him with one careless flick of a powerful forearm.

"Nearly left you, honey. Thought you jes' weren't comin'."

"I missed the bus, Bert."

"So I see. Will you hurry inside, and get lunch goin' for the hands?"

Caroline Masters looked briefly down at Tom. "This is my husband," she murmured —and went into the caboose, without a backward glance.

Tom smiled up at the platform, rather vaguely. "So I gathered," he said. "Howdy, boss."

Bert Masters glanced down at him for the first time—a level, lynx-eyed look, not friendly. And then Masters jumped down from the moving car, with his left hand held out.

A southpaw, thought Tom. Who said that all left-handers are crazy anyhow? He put out his own palm in a hesitant handshake—just as the foreman crossed with his right, smashing him full on the jaw with a stinging uppercut.

"That's on account," said Masters, and jumped for the fast-moving platform of the caboose.

Tom Strang picked himself up from the palmettoes with the taste of blood salty on his tongue. Blind with rage, he went for the caboose with both fists up.

Masters, securely anchored to the back platform now, whip-lashed his right leg in mid-air, connecting a copper-shod heel squarely with Tom's head. Adam Strang's only heir went down again—frontward this time. A dozen freight trains whirled through his brain, exploding like comets in a chromatic sky, just before the sun went down to blackout.

WILL PURVIS started out of a deep sleep at the cotton-wool edge of dawn. Artists with incomes usually sleep late of a morning, especially artists rich enough to set up a studio in an orange grove far down the Indian River. But Will's sleep had just been shattered rudely by the whir of wings.

Still in his pajamas, he groped his way through his big, littered workroom, caroming off an easel as full wakefulness returned. The heavy dew still dripped like rain from the porch-eaves; beyond his broad lawn, Will saw the endless sweep of tidal river, muffled almost to the bank in dense morning mist.

And then he heard the propeller-beat, far out in the clearing sky, saw a chromium flash of wingtips as the amphibian plummeted down to level away smoothly into the heart of the fog. Will Purvis chuckled as he went down the porch and called through the kitchen door to his cook.

"You can start breakfast, Noah. He's on time."

The plane had already begun to taxi up when he returned. Will felt his heart miss a beat, watching the amphibian bear down on the river bank. And then, in a twinkling, wheels dropped down smoothly beside the pontoons. The chromium gull, a smoothly functioning machine, rolled casually up the broad lawn as the motor died, cannoning to a stop a hundred feet beyond the veranda steps. Tom Strang jumped out with a cheery wave, unfastening the strap of his helmet.

"I smell coffee. Does that mean you got my message?"

"Standing by for orders," said Will. "It isn't every morning you fly in for breakfast, Tom."

"Sure it's all right to park the ship here for a while?"

"Positive, idiot. After all, I didn't graduate with you for nothing. Why, I even

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sent Noah into Port Jefferson yesterday for tarpaulins." Will stepped back a pace, and looked Tom over in earnest. "What's wrong with your jaw? It looks like a rotten apple. I'd like to paint that rainbow under your left eye, too."

"It's a long story, fellow. D'you mind if I talk after we eat?"

WILL PURVIS pushed aside his empty cup, and lit a cigarette. Across the table, his guest still stared down thoughtfully at a well-cleared plate.

"Even for a Yale man, that's fast thinking."

Tom looked up sharply. "So you think I'm shooting at the moon?"

"Not at all. But you do have a lot to prove."

"I said there's a rotten smell in Denmark. You can prove that anywhere."

"You mean, someone is working overtime to pull a fast one on your dad?"

"I mean someone is honing a knife to trim me down to size. Someone ordered that foreman to take a poke at me."

"Maybe he was just sore because you sidetracked his wife."

"Take a good look, fellow; am I the type to inspire jealousy?"

"In any climate," said Will Purvis, "you gold-plated cowpoke."

"Shut up. I don't want to talk like a movie, but has there been any rustling on our range lately?"

"How should I know?"

"Answer me one question. Our property line begins just twenty miles inland from here—on the lake road?"

"Check."

"You've carried your paint-box over most of that country, Will. I've seen a dozen canvases in the Selig Galleries to prove that—including a picture of our bunkhouse. If you can't answer my question, who can?"

"Rustling's an ugly word, Tom." Will leaned forward anxiously. "What started you on that tack, anyhow?"

"A remark my uncle made about a fence patrol."

"That?" Will chuckled. "This country has been an open range since the days of the Seminoles. Naturally, they've resented—"

"Who are *they?*"

"The small owners. They've cut the Strang fences more than once, in an effort to get their stock to water. Masters and his boys have traded punches—and perhaps a little buckshot—to drive them off. They've set fires, too; that's routine practice down here, among the old-line cattlemen; you see, the burnt-over land always sprouts a little fresh grass in the spring. But all that is a far call from rustling."

"Could Masters be in cahoots with them?"

"Naturally. He comes from the other Coast—a little place near Tampa. Went back there for his bride a year ago, if I can believe the gossip in town. Still, he's worked for your uncle for nearly ten years now; plenty of time to make contacts, if he's the type."

Tom walked slowly to the veranda rail, and stared for a long time at the Indian River—an endless, shining mirror, now the sun had burned the morning fog away. "Thanks, Will. You've been most helpful. If you can just keep this business of the plane dark, for a while—"

"Might I ask why?"

"Who knows? I might want to do a little aerial photography later. Much less inspired than your paintings, of course; but more accurate."

Will Purvis hesitated. "I can add one other fact, if it'll interest you. Outside your own range, there isn't a cowhand in those two counties who wouldn't be happy to welcome you with a branding iron."

"Good. That's another reason for joining my outfit on time."

"Stubborn, aren't you?"

"I've just had a flash of perception. Dad sent me here for a baptism of fire, nothing more. Suppose I give him the shock of his life. Suppose I *really* earn that ticket abroad." Tom returned to the table, and put out his hand. "Thanks for the hangar, Will. To say nothing of a useful working

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blueprint. Now, will you lead me to a garage? I must buy myself a jaloppy—that's essential, too."

Will Purvis got up anxiously. "Perhaps I should drive you over to the lake."

"Nonsense. From now on, I'm a lone wolf. Or should I say—a lone ranger?"

III

THE ancient Ford took the curve into the fire-scarred scrub, wheezing protest from every carbon-choked cylinder as Tom tried in vain to coax out a little speed. This was no road for a motorist to linger over. Not this barren land, ringed by cypress, and cabbage-palms like upended feather-dusters against the copper sky.

Lake Okeechobee was somewhere to the left: he'd had several glimpses, when the ring of sad, yellow cypress dwindled into muck. Even the lake was unreal. An endless, primitive sea, a painted illustration from an encyclopedia, without form or meaning.

So this was the sort of range a Florida cowboy rode. No wonder Uncle Jed had worked overtime on those solemn word pictures. Osceola City, so-called, was only a mile ahead in that wilderness of pine-barrens. A glance at his speedometer and the road-map on the seat beside him told Tom that he would pick up the tracks of the freight spur any moment now.

Instinctively, he slackened speed, as though to put off the moment of joining battle. And then his jaw set at a familiar angle, as his right toe touched the floor again. Human contact of any sort was preferable to this landscape—including buckshot and branding irons.

Tom was still smiling at his own melodrama when he followed the road to the lake shore, took the right-angle turn along the side of a deep bayou on the north, and rattled into the freight shelter by the tracks, with colors flying.

He saw no town worthy of the name. A flat-packed road, bound on either shoulder by a mat of wire grass, wandered crazily away into the muck beyond. On either side, unpainted company bungalows sat firmly on stilts above the bright-green sea of dog-fennel.

There were a dozen corrals on the far side of the tracks, mantled now with a thick haze of dust, and from them there came a cacophony of grinding hooves. Tom sat under the wheel for a moment, watching the bulldozers work on the herd. Scrawny yearlings for the most part, milling in the pens while they waited their turn to load for a one-way trip to Texas.

Then he walked through the freight shed to the platform, a little stiff-legged still in his new jeans and high-heeled cowboy boots. A familiar figure turned sharply as Tom's feet clattered the planks.

"Good morning, Uncle Jed. Fancy finding you here."

Conklin favored his nephew with a long stare before he spoke. "Perhaps I should return the compliment, Tom."

"Don't tell me I'm late for work?"

"Report to your foreman," said Conklin briefly. "I'm not in charge here."

"That must be hard to bear. Why are you here at all, if I'm not too bold?"

"I'm generally on hand for the loadings." His uncle nodded curtly, precisely as though Tom had been a stranger to him, before he went down the platform and sent a brisk haloo into the dust cloud beyond. Bert Masters materialized from the murk astride a cow pony that seemed an extension of the man's own personality: yellow-eyed, flat-eared, and more than slightly unreliable.

The foreman glared at Tom, with no visible sign of recognition. "You'll find a skin up the track, brother," he said. "Get aboard, and pitch in."

Tom walked past the pens, following the ties to a clump of jack-pines beyond. He felt eyes trail him, as the bulldozers looked up from their work; a jet of tobacco juice cut the air like a brown sword, as one of the boys expelled his breath in a long wail.

"Where's yo' airship, brother?"

"Where'd yo' buy them nice sto' pants?"

"Hiiiii, Yank! Pin back those ears!"

He heard the whip sing through the air behind him, to lash his hat into the dust.

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Tom grinned, and picked up his hat with an airy wave. Chin up, Strang, and damn everybody! Then he walked into the grove of pines beyond, without glancing back, and whooped at the black boy watching the spare ponies tethered there.

"Which is mine?"

MASTERS had called his mount a skin, and Tom saw the justice of the nickname when the Negro hostler unhobbled him under the big pine tree. Thin as a rail and twice as mean, the cow pony waited with his forelegs spread and nostrils twitching. When the hostler slapped in the bit, Tom saw a dental plan that would have done credit to a cannibal king.

Harness welts scarred the red fuzz of his barrel, but his back seemed firm enough. Tom noted this much while he searched the saddle expertly for a concealed rowel. The girth seemed solid; apparently, they were going to give him an honest whirl, at least.

The hostler stepped back with a grin. "Ride him, mister. He ain't *that* mean—not quite."

But Tom was already in the saddle, slapping the sorrel's flanks with a Texas warwhoop. The cow pony's head went up: he pawed the air, sawing savagely on the firm bit before he went into a barrel-roll. Tom came out of that standing up, the reins still in his hand. Bracing himself firmly, he brought the horse to four feet again, and vaulted to the saddle a second time in the same sure motion.

Every eye in the corral was on him now. Tom could even afford to grandstand it a bit, adjusting the strap of his sombrero with one hand while he controlled the sorrel's tossing head with the other. Then he slackened on the reins, and let the horse buck his temper out, a slashing nightmare that cut deep into the palmettoes, where not even the wildest maverick would try a barrel-roll.

Finally, Tom brought the pawing hooves out of the air with one smooth slap of the reins. Winded, if not precisely docile, the cow pony trotted easily toward the corrals. The murmur that went up was not precisely a cheer, but it was a pretty fair substitute.

Tom glanced mechanically toward the loading platform, but Jed Conklin had vanished long ago. Too bad he missed my little initiation ceremony, thought Tom. Of course, that's probably only a gentle hint of what's coming later. He rode over firmly to Masters, with his chin still high and his temper intact.

"Ready, boss. Where do I start?"

IT WAS a big loading, but Masters knew his job. Every man under him was streaked with dust and sweat by four, when they knocked off briefly to gnaw at a hardtack lunch in the sparse shade of the jackpines.

By that time, Tom was indistinguishable from the rest—save for an ache of muscles he tried hard to hide, a bone weariness that made the slightest move a screaming protest. But he scrambled promptly to his feet with the others, to wave the cattle train down the rails. Tom got a brief glimpse of his uncle, staring down coldly from the locomotive cab. There was no glint of recognition in his eye, as the train whipped past.

"Right this way, brother. We're riding out now."

He swung into the saddle with the others, ignoring the agony of aching tendons as his knees bit into the sorrel's side. Masters led the file down a cowpath that snaked northeastward into the thick scrub. In that brief flash of hooves, civilization became a thing of the past. Ten miles from a road, thought Tom. Could he stay on his pony's back that long?

The path mounted to higher ground, through a green mist of dog-fennel; someone whooped down the file, increasing the tempo of the hooves as they burst into the burnt-over barrens. Tom lowered his jaw grimly, and cantered with the others.

The rest happened in a fog of fatigue. Hours later, it seemed, they turned into a still narrower trail skirting an endless file of fence posts—business-like steel pylons,

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with triple strands of barb-wire stretched taut as guitar strings between them. Still later, Tom remembered the smooth swish of a gate turning back on well-oiled hinges to let the outfit pass.

They were following a wider trail now, along a gentle, rising slope thick with sun-bitten wire grass. Beyond was a creek choked with water-hyacinth, a cypress hammock like a visible phantom against the westering sun. Tom felt his chin jolt against his chest, as he started awake; he had been riding blind for some time, trusting his sorrel to follow the lead of the hooves ahead.

"Bit tired, brother? Feel like droppin' out a while?"

Tom awoke in earnest. Masters had just reined in beside him, looking indestructible as Fate itself, and quite as menacing. His lynx-eyes were narrowed to mocking slits.

"That's right, Yank. Sit up and take notice. We're nearabout home now; bunkhouse's on the rise, just beyond that hammock. Still want to join our happy family, after today's workout?"

"Would I be here, if I didn't?"

"Maybe you'll oblige me by steppin' down—jes' so I can make sure?"

It was not said pleasantly. Still a bit heavy-headed, Tom watched Masters jump down to the hard-packed earth just inside the gate. He noticed that the rest of the outfit had bunched into a compact group on the rise beyond, to watch intently.

"What's the point, boss?"

"Don't call me boss," snarled Masters. "You're not hired yet."

Tom brought up his guard this time, with a whole half-second to spare. The left hook crashed through regardless, clipping his ear with stunning force.

"Are you tough enough to stay, Yank?"

Tom answered with a roundhouse punch all his own, that sent the foreman spinning. The watchers on the rise whooped in unison as Masters came back for more, throwing both fists wildly. It was an onslaught no boxer could stand against without resorting to similar technique. Tom met it cheek-to-jowl; and for a few seconds, they stood there, trading punches like twin hurricanes.

Masters broke first, stumbled backward, and went down among the palmettoes. When Tom rushed in to press his advantage, the foreman lifted a pair of copper-shod heels, with bone-shaking violence. With a single, straining gasp Tom back-somersaulted out of range, deep in the palmettoes.

The outfit whooped again, when Masters rose triumphant; they whooped in earnest as Tom flung himself at the foreman one more time, wheezing like a broken bellows, both arms pumping madly. Masters straightened him with a sickening smash over the heart, and set him on his ear again with another hook. Twice more Tom came back for punishment, and at each hopeless rush, the watchers cheered from the rise. Then, finally, Tom lay still.

Masters turned aside and spat out a tooth, thoughtfully. "Want him, boys? He's all yours."

Tom heard the voice from a great distance, mingled now with the clatter of hooves on the sun-baked earth. He was still trying feebly to get up for another rush, when he felt something cold nuzzle the nape of his neck. The sorrel, standing by for his rider.

Tom inched slowly up along the girth, summoning all his will to throw a leg over the saddle. He saw now that two of the boys were waiting for him on the rise, and rode shakily in their direction. One of them leaned over and took the sorrel's bridle; the other patted Tom's shoulder roughly, without words, and cuffed him gently behind the ear. It was more than a welcome, that cuff: it was the accolade.

IV

CAROLINE was shelling peas in the kitchen when she heard someone ride up to the front steps of the bungalow. She came out through the sparsely furnished sitting-room, shedding her apron en route. Tom smiled up at her over the railing, which he had just used as an impromptu hitching post.

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"Good morning, Mrs. Masters. Thought I'd stop by, in case you're still curious."

"Don't tell me you've been fired."

"Day off. Even Yankees earn one, occasionally."

She looked at him intently, realized she was staring, and colored faintly. But she had seen that he was deep-tanned now, and steady on his feet: his voice had the ring of a man who belonged, a man who had risen above such trivial things as hatred and fatigue.

"How long have you been on the range?"

"Six weeks to the day. Would you say the life agreed with me?"

Caroline met his eyes in earnest now: she saw that the bruises along his hard young jaw had vanished long ago. Bert had been more than explicit about those bruises, when he came in from the scrub on his last holiday.

"Apparently you're tougher than I thought," said Caroline. It was not what she had meant to say at all; and yet it seemed to fit the moment well enough.

Tom grinned. "Thanks," he murmured. "I was a bit surprised, myself."

"Have you and Bert—" The question had come quite spontaneously; it was too late to withdraw it now.

"Got along, you mean?" Tom nodded slowly. "I gather you've heard of the—the Homeric combat?"

Caroline looked away. "It's only part of his system of authority. Do you understand that now?"

"I understood all along," said Tom. "D'you think he'll wade into me again, if he hears I've been talking here with you? I'm in the pink now, and used to his four-footed way of mixing in. Maybe I could give him a run for his money."

"Don't, please. I hope they haven't been too hard on you."

"K.P.'d to death for a while, of course," said Tom, cheerfully. "To say nothing of all the practical jokes in the books. But I haven't been ridden since that first day. Not even by—him. Not that we're bosom friends, of course."

"Then why are you calling on me?"

Tom met the challenge with another candid smile. "You're lonesome here, aren't you? Well, so am I. Surely there's no harm in pooling loneliness, if it's done in broad daylight."

Caroline Masters regarded him levelly for a long moment. "I wish I could be sure whether you're friendly—or just impertinent."

"Can't I be both?" Tom turned back to his sorrel pony, soothing him with a word. "I'm driving over to Port Jefferson as soon as I've stabled Rozinante. Then I'm taking my ship into the air for a workout. May I stop here for you this afternoon?"

"Thank you, no."

"Wouldn't you enjoy a little spin after lunch?"

"You plan to fly over the lake?"

"And the range, just to see how a cowhand looks from the air." Tom held her eyes on that. "Who can object?"

"Have you any idea the sensation—"

Tom glanced casually across the sweep of scrub and bayou, shockingly empty in the great blazing light of the Florida morning. "I see no one handy to shock, do you?"

"Sorry, I've already said no."

"Have it your way, Mrs. Masters. It seemed like a good idea, at the time."

He started away.

Caroline stopped him with her voice, as he led the pony back toward the road. "What makes you think I'm unhappy?"

"The word I used was lonely."

"My husband's a hard man; he has to be, to survive in that job. Just because I married young, you needn't think—" She dropped that line, and started over. "He's doing all he can to get us out of this—this rut. When we met in Tampa, I never dreamed—" She paused in earnest. "You are much too easy to talk to, Mr. Strang. Good day."

She fully intended to stalk into the house on that, slamming the screen to make her point. Instead, she paused on the top step of the veranda, to wave him down the road. Then she turned back to her work, feeling the silence close around her like a wall.

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LEVELING away at a hundred feet above the endless blue mirror of Lake Okeechobee that afternoon, Tom cut his propellers for a three-point landing. Seen at this distance, the water was murky, with a chocolate stain at its heart— the distillation of an immense bog, despite the resemblance to an inland sea.

He sat at the controls for a long time, missing the feeling of lift he usually had in the air. Then he pulled himself back to reality with an effort, and taxied away into the air again, following the faint smudge of shoreline until he dipped his wings above Osceola City, a mere forlorn speck in an endless, dust-green panorama.

Firmly resisting the temptation to level off again, he pushed his altimeter to twelve thousand feet before he set a northeast course across the prairie. A disagreeable chore, this reconnaissance. Far better to get it over alone, without using Caroline as an unknowing accomplice. Yes, he was glad, in his heart, that she had refused to accompany him—quite apart from the question of loyalty.

Tom went into a power dive when he picked up the Strang property line, and followed the fence with the precision of a homing arrow. There were two of the hands, working in the brush. Tom answered their wave, and zoomed again. Far down the line of concrete posts, where the fence dipped into a dry savannah, Tom dropped down to three hundred feet . . . two-fifty . . . a hundred.

Skipping the palmetto tops like a circus stunter, he felt his heart jump a full beat when he saw the man frozen to the pylon dead ahead. A lank-haired man with a bald spot, who dropped the steel pruning-shears and whipped shotgun to shoulder, just before the shadow of the plane engulfed him.

Tom opened the motor wide, zooming just in time. Without turning, he knew that the fence-cutter had dropped flat to avoid the shearing death of the propeller blades; knew, too, that he would scramble for cover long before he dared bank for a second view. No matter. He had made his point in record time. Tom Strang leveled off again, and pointed the ship's nose for the Indian River, twenty miles down the monotonous horizon.

FOREMAN MASTERS, hunched over a mosquito smudge at the bunkhouse door a scant three hours later, regarded his newest hand with a meditative eye.

"Who asked you to come skylarkin' over the range on your day off?"

"It was all my own idea. From horse to jaloppy to plane, and back again to you. A century of progress in reverse." Tom blinked at Masters through the smoke, wondering resentfully why the foreman's eyes didn't smart, too. "Don't you think it's a good idea?"

"You mean huntin' rustlers from the air?"

"Most of this terrain is flat as a table. I could patrol all of it in two hours, thoroughly. Look what happened this afternoon—just as an experiment. Your own men were working in the brush, less than a half-mile away from that poacher."

"Sounds like old man Willis, from your description. And don't you call him a poacher. He's been cuttin' our wire for years now. Matter of principle."

"Why don't you break it up?"

Masters spat into the fire. "Why don't you mind your business?"

"We could lay out a landing field here in three days time. I could use the creek for a take-off, if it were clear of hyacinth."

The foreman spoke slowly. "Funny, it never crossed my mind before. Did your old man send you here to spy?"

"Riding herd by plane was all my own idea."

"Then you better sleep it off."

Tom got up resignedly, with a long yawn. "Of course, if you *want* to close your eyes to your neighbors—"

"All right, Yank, you asked for it. Last spring, Willis lost sixty-one head, because that fence cut his stock off from water; the Arcadia outfit lost forty-seven; the Duncan brothers had to butcher green veal in their own corrals, when the rains didn't come.

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"How long d'you think I'd last *this* spring, if I don't let those boys cut a little wire?" Masters got to his feet wrathfully. "What's more, you can tell your dad, and be damned. Jed Conklin knows what's what; he'll back me—"

Tom sat down casually, leaning his back against the bunkhouse wall. "In that case, why are you taking a wire patrol down the line?"

"Hold your mouth," said Masters. "You're still off duty, remember." Then he stalked away in earnest, into the deepening dusk. Tom tilted his hat over one eye, and experimented with a treble snore. He was snoring in earnest when part of the outfit clattered out on the foreman's trail.

A half-hour later, he sat up with a well rehearsed start, as though emerging from a deep doze. The bunkhouse echoed with emptiness now; for a moment, Tom felt that he must have really slept, as he fumbled among the vacant places. Then he remembered that most of the hands were camped in the western quarter-section for the spring branding. Another trump supplied gratis by fate.

MASTERS had been just forty minutes out of the corral when Tom swung into his sorrel's saddle to slam across the scrub at a gallop. Only a trained cow pony could manage that rough ground in the dark. Tom gave him his head, to quarter back across the range, in the general direction of the railroad spur. Clocking the flying hooves with his wristwatch, Tom pulled up an approximate two miles beyond the bunkhouse, where the land dipped sharply into a dry savannah.

His moves had the trademark of careful rehearsal from that point on. Dismounting quickly, he led the sorrel to a hiding place deep in a grove of water-oaks beyond. Then he dropped to a crouch, and scurried into the open savannah on the alert, pausing in the inky shadow of a huge cabbage palm that thrust up straight from that level ground like a lighthouse in a brown sea.

Pausing only to shed his spurs, Tom went up the trunk of that palm with the speed—if not the agility—of a chimpanzee. Safely ambushed in the tufted top, a good sixty feet above ground, he made himself comfortable with the same simian ease.

And then he settled down to do a good job of watching.

He had arrived with seconds to spare. The low rumble of hooves, a distant, unreal thunder in the clear starlight, had drawn steadily nearer. Now, as Tom settled among the dry crackle of the palm fronds, he saw the leader burst into view—a piebald steer with two splintered horns, pacing the herd at a slow but dogged trot, heading straight for the gap that Willis' shears had made that afternoon. Tom counted almost a hundred head before the herd swept past, flanked by a pair of masked riders. It was a quick flash of racing flanks, unreal as a stock-shot in a neighborhood movie.

He watched intently while one of the herders dropped out of line and carefully whipped the broken wire into place again on the steel pylon. Then his eyes turned sharply to the rising ground beyond. A man had just ridden into view over that hump of prairie—a tall silhouette against the starlight, insolently unmasked. Even before he raised his arm to signal, it was obvious that he had come to take command.

A whip spoke in the dark like a rifle crack. The piebald steer swung into a path that led across the rise to the embankment of the railroad spur, a mile or so away. Horses and riders cantered in that direction now, led by the newcomer at a smart pace. Tom drew in his breath, expelled it in a noiseless sigh. Before he could breathe again, the last of the herd had vanished over that hump of earth. The dust of their passing settled slowly among the palmettoes, a ghostly patina in the starlight.

Adam Strang's son and heir sat for a long moment atop his palm tree, with a deep-furrowed brow. Then, when he had quite made up his mind, he slid slowly down and loped across the savannah to the thicket of water-oaks, where his pony waited.

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V

WILL PURVIS crossed the big, littered studio living room and sat down at his easel. He picked up a bit of charcoal and snapped it mechanically between his spatulate craftsman's fingers. His voice was plaintive, with an odd overtone of excitement.

"But I'm just a struggling artist, Tom. Why turn me into a G-man, too?"

"I'm asking you to do a simple chore for me—"

"Kidnaping doesn't sound simple."

Tom got up from the window seat and ranged across to the easel, with his eyes blazing. "Of course, if you won't help to that extent—"

"I haven't refused, you idiot. Just let me register a well bred protest, before I start taking orders. You know yourself this is a risky business. Even if you'd built a complete case, from the start. How do you plan to make Masters talk?"

"Will you please leave that to me? Haven't I explained that I can't tell you everything at this time?"

"Let's see how well I do understand you, Tom. Six weeks ago, you saw part of the Strang herd rustled off the range into open country. After a talk with Masters, you feel sure he could name the rustlers, providing he's yanked forcibly from his native habitat and plumped down in the same room with old Adam himself."

"So far, you're right with me, Will."

"Suppose you're wrong. Have you any idea the sort of heat Masters can turn on, if—"

"Dad was willing to risk it, when I phoned."

Will broke another charcoal fragment. "I still can't see why you waited six whole weeks."

"I sat tight for several reasons. Dad was in England six weeks ago; impossible to call him there long distance, with a war on. In the second place, Masters has been on his ear ever since I questioned him. I had to play dumb for six weeks before he simmered down. Finally, there hasn't been a drop of rain since April, and our fence patrol has kept those wires tight as concert pitch ever since. I could hardly skin out before my next leave, without tipping my hand."

Will Purvis sighed deeply. "I suppose this setup is very clear to you. It's still a Chinese puzzle to me."

"But you'll pitch in and help regardless, won't you, Will?"

"How often must I say yes?"

"Check, fellow. In just five minutes, you're stepping into my jaloppy, and driving over to Osceola City, fast as she'll travel. I've left a .38 under the front seat, in case of emergencies."

"Don't stress that angle, please."

"I'll take off in the amphibian, shortly after—flying straight over the lake to the Osceola City bayou, and anchoring there. When it's dark enough, I'll coast in to shore with my motor wide open. Masters and his wife should be having supper in his bungalow then, unless he was lying about the week's leave he promised himself. When I whoop up in the plane, it's even money he'll step out to check on the racket. That's when we shanghai him in the dark—"

"Is that cricket?"

"It's back-alley stuff—and why not? I'm telling you, he has the key to this business. We'll never shake it out of him on the home lot."

Will coughed discreetly. "And the girl—I mean, Mrs. Masters?"

"I've beaten down my conscience in connection with her, too. Either she's in on the job—which I can't believe—or she's innocent. In either case, she must come along for the ride."

"One more question, fellow. Are you gangster, or Galahad?"

"I'll answer that at the proper time. Will you jump into that car of mine, and start rolling?"

WHEN Tom Strang coasted his amphibian down to the tranquil surface of the lake that evening, there was a deep red stain in the west that had nothing to

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do with an already quite extinct sunset.

He studied it briefly, as he cut his motor and drifted slowly in toward the darkening shore. Brush fires, somewhere this side of Arcadia. Part of his mind registered that much mechanically, while he strained his eyes for the wink of Will's headlights along the shore road.

Tom frowned briefly. Perhaps those independent owners had chosen tonight as their deadline; perhaps Masters, scenting trouble at long range, had stayed out in the bunkhouse after all. He dismissed the fear resolutely, and turned over his motors again, warping the plane across the water gently, until he was floating in the mouth of the bayou.

It was a well timed move, after all; he saw now that Will had parked the jaloppy on the road, smack in front of the Masters' bungalow. Both headlights blazed straight out into the dark bayou. . . . The damned fool, did he want to advertise his arrival to the universe?

Tom taxied gingerly in to shore, holding his breath as he cut the motor a second time and coasted in to a cock-eyed pier that straggled out into the shallows. Then he held his breath in earnest, as a woman's voice drifted out across the water in an unmistakable hail. He saw them now, standing at the pier's end and waving madly. Caroline Masters, with Will beside her; there was enough light left to be sure of that much.

"Airship ahoy!"

"Drop your anchor and walk in, Tom," shouted Will. "You'll ground for sure, if you come another yard."

Tom obeyed the order in a kind of trance. Still bemused, he threw one leg over a pontoon, and stepped off into water that scarcely reached to his waist—a viscous fluid that became primeval ooze in a dozen paces. He floundered through somehow to the pier; Will and Caroline each gave him a hand up from mud to dock.

"Don't bother introducing us," said Will cheerily. "We've spent a pleasant ten minutes getting acquainted, while we waited for you."

But Tom was already searching for Caroline's eyes in the gloom. They looked troubled, to put it mildly.

"Where is your husband?"

"Bert left almost an hour ago. He said he was riding over to Port Jefferson to talk to you."

"Would you mind saying that again?"

Caroline Masters led the way down the dock. "He came in early today, and phoned the head office in Jacksonville. I wasn't in the room at the time. He wouldn't let me listen in. About six tonight, he sat down and wrote a note to you—in case he missed you at Port Jefferson. Then, as I say, he rode away."

"Why did he wait all day, if he intended to talk to me?"

"Why ask me?" said Caroline.

"You mentioned a note, I believe—"

"You'll find it on a table in the bungalow."

Tom looked at her intently, for a long moment. Then he set off down the road at a run. The note, sealed in a company envelope, stood propped against a lamp in the cottage living room; Tom spotted it before he burst through the screen-door. He read it once by the lamp—again, by the jaloppy headlights, while he waited for Will and Caroline to catch up with his headlong rush.

"Think carefully, Mrs. Masters. You're *sure* he left less than an hour ago?"

"Positive. If you must know, I've been pacing the veranda ever since. Nervous enough to hail the first car that passed. That's how Mr. Purvis and I—"

Tom brushed the interpolation aside. "You know nothing of this—this message, of course?"

"Less than that, Mr. Strang."

Again their eyes met and held. Tom nodded, and jumped under the wheel of the jaloppy.

"Stay where you are, both of you. I've a chance to ride him down yet, if I hurry." He leaned around the windshield, to thrust the note into Caroline's hand. "You might read this in the meantime. It'll enlighten you on—several points."

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THE red glow in the west had grown to nightmare proportions now. Driving into the open country beyond the Strang freight shed, Tom found that he could manage nicely without headlights. He saw why when he breasted the first rise and roared down upon a second blaze—a whole dry hammock, crackling like a college bonfire.

Tongues of flame were already licking into the scrub on either side; and driving past the growing holocaust was like passing an open furnace door. Tom went by with the accelerator on the floor, ignoring the demon-dance of a half-dozen silhouetted figures against the blaze, ducking instinctively as a crazy shotgun charge whistled through the jaloppy's canvas top. Apparently, he had been recognized, even without headlights.

Perhaps he was wasting his energy, after all; it was even money, now, whether or not Masters had crashed that fiery ring in time. Still, there was only one road to Port Jefferson, and twenty long miles of it. There was still time to overtake him, if he had really tried to do the distance on horseback.

Tom switched on his lights again, as the glow faded in the scrub behind him; three miles more, and those lights picked up the familiar, angular shape of Bert Masters' pony, a patient, nearly motionless outline on the shoulder of the road.

Tom parked carefully in the midst of the empty macadam, before he climbed out to investigate. The horse whinnied lightly—a banshee wail that brought every hair of Tom's scalp on end. Masters was lying on his face, with one arm curled comfortably under his cheek, almost as though he had dropped off on the mat of wiregrass. There wasn't a great deal of blood—and no sign of violence, aside from the neat, dark hole at the base of his brain.

Tom made no effort to disturb the body. Avoiding the soft shoulder of the road with the greatest care, he studied the ground for fifty feet on either side of the macadam, before he got soberly back to his car.

Then he drove a quarter-mile beyond to make his U-turn—and back-tracked, with all the speed he had.

The brush-burners stood across the road in a solid row now, waving him back with incoherent howls as he bore down upon them. His nerves were braced for the blast of gunfire that did not come this time. Their scramble for safety was part of the nightmare now; Tom never knew if his mudguards missed them by yards or inches. He saw what had prompted them, but it was too late to stop, even if he had wanted to.

He lifted one hand from the wheel, to whip a bandana across nose and mouth. The fire had leaped the road long ago. It met him in a searing tornado; in the background, pine trees fizzed a fiery obligato, like Roman candles in Brobdingnag.

For one terrible moment, the jaloppy's engine coughed and died, as the radiator cap blew skyward. Momentum alone carried him through the danger zone, to a spot where he could kick the starter to life again. A scant mile beyond, he braked frantically, and leaped to safety just as the burning canvas top caved in on the wheelbase.

The rest was a continuation of nightmare. Stripped to the waist, and black as an oiler's monkey, Tom staggered down the road away from his blazing car. Billows of resin-laden smoke blanketed the countryside now, as the fire closed about the Strang property in a fatal ring. The jaloppy's death agony had carried him to within a mile of the freight spur, which gave some faint meaning to the race with fire. It was a conflagration that needed no breath of air to fan it on; the tinder-dry scrub was inducement enough to those greedy flames.

Freight shed and corrals were burning brightly when Tom staggered into the marl road, with eyebrows gone and hair singed. The bungalows had caught in a dozen places from the leaping sparks. He had been hammering for some time on the Masters' door before he noticed the hand tugging insistently at one arm. Will Purvis

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whipped an arm around his sweat-grimed shoulders, as they staggered back to the road again.

"So we've an airman in our midst, after all. I didn't think you'd dare—"

"Someone has to fly you out of this. Where is she, Will?"

"Sitting on one of your pontoons, waiting for you. Sure you can walk?"

"Not quite, fellow. But I *know* I can fly."

Looking back on it later, Tom knew that he went out of the picture for a while. He had a memory of blessedly cool water on his face, when he reeled into the muddy shallows, with Will's arm still about him. Then he was swarming weakly over the side of the amphibian. A voice, not quite his own, was ordering the others to take their places.

Caroline's face swam briefly out of the red night, just before he settled into the pilot's seat. But there was no time to answer the question in her eyes now. He pressed her hand, instead, just before he gave the plane the gun.

Thank God for wings tonight, he thought. Praise all the gods of luck for Masters' note.

He turned to shout against the motors' mounting roar.

"You've kept his letter?"

Caroline nodded mutely, as the plane spiraled into the night, far above inferno. Tom Strang leaned back to press her hand one more time. Then he set his course due east.

VI

HE TOLD her everything an hour later, while the amphibian floated tranquilly offshore from Will's lawn. Will himself had gone to report to the sheriff. Tom told the story simply, sparing her only a few of the details. She was crying against his shoulder when he finished—quite naturally as though her head had belonged there since the beginning of time.

Tom put an awkward arm around her. In the circumstances, it was hard to make it nothing more than a gesture of conciliation. "You suspected nothing—really?"

"Not until I read his note to you, Tom. When all's said and done, I'm a right innocent female. But what made you think that—"

"I'm afraid it's a long story. Don't let me distress you with it now."

Caroline's eyes smiled at him wanly, through brimming lids. "Reckon I'm cryin' because he turned out to be human, after all."

"Human enough to play both ends against the middle. I'm glad you're taking this so—so splendidly."

The girl hesitated, with the air of one about to take the plunge. "After all, it isn't as though we were in love."

Tom felt his heart skip a beat. He sat very straight beside her, there in the tranquil starlight, hoping she could not see his face too clearly.

"Say that again—fast!"

"Bert was courtin' me, ever since we were in grammar school. I told him I didn't love him, from the start. Then he rode into town last year, with a real job and big prospects—to hear him tell it. Anything seemed better than growin' into an old maid in Ozona."

"Don't talk that way."

"Come to Ozona sometime, Tom—you'll see what I mean." She was talking quietly now, with only an undertone of hysteria. "Bert put things on a bargain basis. I mean, he promised I could try marriage for a year, and then walk out if we weren't suited. Funny, how hard I tried to live up to my end of that. But he was one of those men who lost interest in a woman, once she became his"—she hesitated a long time over the word—"shall I say—possession?"

"Don't say anything. I understand."

"Lord knows I wanted to be loyal—if he'd been home often enough to give me a chance. I tried to make things nice for him; to understand his work when he'd talk about it. Was it wicked of me to sit and pray that year would end quickly?"

Then a strange thing happened. Caroline was in Tom's arms, quite dry-eyed

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now, her lips against his. Or perhaps it was Tom who swept the girl into that embrace. Neither could remember when they looked back on the moment later.

"Was that wicked too, Tom?"

"Not if you didn't plan it in advance."

Caroline colored to the eyes. "But I did. From the moment you bumped into me on Bay Street."

"In that case, we've both been wicked." Tom got up hastily, and turned over his motors. Will Purvis was running across the lawn with the sheriff in tow, waving wildly.

ADAM STRANG belonged to that breed of millionaire that prides itself on restraint. It was a quality that served him admirably the following day, as he lounged in his brother-in-law's swivel chair, and watched Jed Conklin pace a frenetic morning away.

Adam Strang was an heirloom piece at sixty: cherub-bald, with warm blue eyes that flashed but rarely, these days. He masked his amusement now, bending to light a fresh cigar when Conklin pounced on the dictograph to shout another reporter out of his anteroom.

"How long must we wait, Adam?"

"Judging by the newspapers, Tom has put in a strenuous night. Even the toughest of us must rest, on occasion."

"You still won't explain why he's called you down from New York without informing me?"

"Isn't that also up to Tom?"

Jed Conklin turned his back. "Haven't I explained that all the trouble started because we wouldn't let other stock to water?"

Adam studied the ash on his cigar. "Then we're well out of it, Jed. A hundred-thousand-dollar depot ruined, because you had to play Simon Legree. No complainants but the insurance companies. Rest assured *I* shall press charges against no one—"

Tom spoke from the doorway. "Don't be too sure, Dad. May we come in?"

He entered on that note, fire-blackened but unbowed in his fresh white linens. Will Purvis followed, one arm swathed to the elbow in a linseed bandage. The elder Strang glanced inquiringly toward the anteroom.

"Didn't you mention someone by the name of Masters, son?"

"Two of them. The widow is resting at a hotel. I'm to go to her the moment this session's over. As for her husband—Bert Masters, your foreman—he's in the Port Jefferson morgue at this moment, with a bullet in his brain."

Tom crossed to the desk, and sat down comfortably on one corner. "I've come all this way to accuse Uncle Jed of his murder. Quite formally, of course."

Jed Conklin whirled from the window. But Adam Strang had already roared a command for silence.

"Carry on, Tom."

"It's a fairly long story, Dad. First off, I don't want that ticket abroad. Not yet, at any rate."

"You haven't earned it yet," said Adam.

"Right. There's a cleanup job to do in that scrub. A big job, helping little people."

Conklin rumbled to his feet. "If there's a point to this—"

"Are you denying that you foreclosed on all those little fellows—and fenced them until they had to meet your terms, or starve?"

"Never mind that. I'm asking you to back up the monstrous charge you—"

"Are you denying you bought up their cattle, added them to Dad's herd without entering them on the books, and shipped them north in his cars under your brand?"

"Emphatically."

"Your foreman tells a different story, in black and white." Tom drew a charred note from his pocket, and slapped it on the desk. "I'll go further. Masters accuses you, point-blank, of killing his predecessor with a blow of your fist."

"By God, young man—"

"Yes, Uncle Jed—in one of those bursts of rage you just can't keep down. Too bad Masters was the only witness. Naturally, he's been hand-in-glove with you since."

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CONKLIN moistened his lips before he spoke. "You can't prove a word—" But Tom's calm eyes silenced him.

"The proof's in my pocket. From Masters' viewpoint, it was a perfect arrangement. Twenty percent on every bill of lading. Money to buy hands, on the nights you made those transfers across the Strang property line. Naturally, all that ill-will on the other side of our fences made a perfect smoke-screen. No matter what went wrong, you could blame it on rustlers. Even when you began to grow bolder, and robbed Dad's own herds, outright.

"Still, I think it was a bit rash of you to ride without a mask, one night six weeks ago. You see, I was watching, from that big cabbage palm in the savannah.

"My job was over then, providing I could make Masters talk. Will and I were still working out that detail when you played straight into our hands. Don't squirm, please; all of Jacksonville knows you've been in financial straits recently.

"Your bank knows that you were hard up for money when that last big shipment went through. Desperate enough to ignore Masters' sound advice, and keep that fence-wire tight as a concentration camp; desperate enough to hold up his usual payment, to go mulish on the long-distance phone, when he threatened to tell me the whole story."

"But he didn't tell you anything—"

"So we're talking now? Of course he told me nothing, face to face; you prevented that, with your usual dispatch. But he did play safe, and leave this note for me—a bit burnt at the edges now, but quite readable.

"Never mind that angle now. We know that you persuaded Masters to give you until six to raise his money. Your garage has just told us that you drove south to Port Jefferson early yesterday morning—the moment you hung up, I suppose.

"It was a careful plot, wasn't it, Uncle? You knew I was at Will's place—Masters had told you that much. You knew he'd wait until six before he rode over to find me. Plenty of time for you to park in the scrub and ambush him.

"Unfortunately, you were a bit overanxious about getting clear, once you put a bullet through his head. The police have already taken a casting of your tire-marks, where you made a short turn on the shoulder, not a dozen feet from Masters' body—"

Tom broke the sentence in the middle, catapulting from the desk-top to trip Jed Conklin in mid-flight, frustrating his dive toward the window.

The room filled with men in a twinkling. Efficient men with handcuffs, and a nightstick or two. A dapper assistant district attorney, complete to briefcase and hornrims.

"I've a stenographer in the anteroom, Mr. Strang. No, *sir*, those reporters were cleared out long ago. Whenever you'd like to start talking in detail, Mr. Conklin—"

. . . Tom leaned back in the armchair with a long sigh, and closed both eyes against Conklin's shambling exit. Once more, he felt tired to the bone, now that he had joined battle and won. There was no sense of exultation in his heart, only a vague contentment. He opened his eyes, as a familiar hand fell on his shoulder.

"Sure you're all right, Tom?"

"Quite all right Dad."

"Still willing to fight the war at home?"

"For the present, at least. Look, Dad, will people think I'm trying to dodge selective service if I get married now?"

Adam Strang gulped. "How's that, son?"

"After a decent interval, of course. She's at the Hotel Seminole now, waiting to meet you. I promised to bring her your blessing by noon."

"Will you please explain what's been going on here?"

"If you don't mind too much, I think I've been growing up. Right this way, Dad; we'll face the cameras together."

Father and son walked through the anteroom arm in arm, with their chins at an identical angle, ignoring the blare of flashlight powder.

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Dan Moore waded into the crowd. He was drunk, but he still could use his fists efficiently

Fools Fly High

BY LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

THE strange and bitter feud between LIEUTENANT DAN MOORE and CAPTAIN ALVIN NAGEL will inevitably lead to disaster. Nagel is constantly daring his fellow officer in the Army flying school to take incredible risks, jealous of Moore's legendary reputation for courage and skill. Among those madman pilots of the early twenties Dan Moore is perhaps the most fearless of all.

But it is a chance remark of Moore's that Nagel uses to get the lieutenant into serious trouble. LIEUTENANT BUNNY BEST has been sent out to rescue the survivors of a crash, and Moore says he doubts Best's flying judgment. Later, in an officers' meeting, Moore discovers that Nagel has repeated the remark to MAJOR ANTAI, the commanding officer, and apparently to Best also. So, when Best cracks up that night, Moore feels a terrible responsibility. Furiously angry, he knocks down Nagel, before cadets and outsiders.

LATER he is not so sure that Nagel did repeat his criticism to Best, but the latter, seriously wounded in the crash, dies without recovering consciousness, and so Moore will never know the truth. Because Dan Moore has struck a superior officer in public, he is court-martialed. But he refuses even to defend himself; dismissal seems inevitable, and he has just learned that he was to be dropped from the Air Service anyway, for the government has just passed an economy bill. So he is through with the Army.

Dan Moore has a further reason for bit-

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terness. Just before his court-martial, he reported that CADET JULIAN HOYT was timing his maneuvers by instruments, an unforgivable sin in Army flying; and Hoyt was expelled from the school. Moore likes the cadet, who apparently did not realize he was cheating; and he is strongly attracted to Hoyt's sister, THERESA, a girl with a lively interest in flying.

ON the train north Dan Moore finds Julian Hoyt and his sister. They hold no resentment against him; in fact, Hoyt is eager to organize an air circus, with Moore as the feature attraction. He reveals to Moore that his ambition is to experiment with instrument flying, to make it possible and dependable. But Moore, with his World War training, considers this an impractical dream, and anyway he's fed up with flying. He is going to get a job on a country newspaper, he announces; and the Hoyts had better give up their crazy scheme.

Somewhat drunk, Dan Moore leaves the train at the tiny town of Selma, and immediately seeks out the editor of the weekly *Bugle*. With this gentleman, one TOM DAWSON, he proceeds to get much drunker, and eventually Dawson tells him that the local money-bags, a man named BERT TALLERAND, owns an old crate. That night, with an equally soused companion, AL BIBBS, they go to where the plane is hangared, and Dan Moore announces that he'll show them how good a pilot he is. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

MOONSHINE IN THE SKY

MOORE showed Bibbs the filler caps for the main tank and the center-section reserve. "Five gallons in both," he said, and turned to inspect the field.

The pasture land was still soft from snow just melted away. But it had a good solid grass turf. It ran north and south, bordering a main gravel highway that would show up well in this moonlight. There was no wind.

Moore noted these things subconsciously. A cold-sober knowledge in the back of his mind warned him that he was making a fool of himself. He was taking an unknown airplane off of a strange field at night and he would have to land back in the same field without lights.

There were many things that should be done. These crowded for his consideration. He should pace the full length of the field to check for obstructions and to be sure he had room for a good take-off run. And should walk around the whole place to be certain there were no cattle who would wander into his path as he took off or landed. A cow can be mighty solid when struck at forty or fifty miles an hour.

There was no telling what condition the plane was in. It might be ready to fall apart. And the engine might quit cold at any instant. That would be bad on take-off. That would be bad at any time. Bright moonlight is deceptive. It gives an illusion of good visibility, without fulfilling that promise. If the engine quit him in the air he would have to feel his way down to a forced landing.

He knew the things he should do. The commonsense minimum precautions. Test all the wing rigging thoroughly, inspect all strut fittings; feel the control cables over for worn, frayed spots; have a look at the cabane rigging of the upper wing; remove all the fuel leads and blow them clean; drain the carburetor. It would be a two-hour job.

He thought of these things and of the circumstances that had brought about this situation. His sudden impulse to leave the train, to get away from young Hoyt and his sister; his afternoon with Tom Dawson drinking and listening to his yarns. And then his sudden statement that he was an airplane pilot, and the need of proving it.

It was all crazy and yet, in some queer fashion, it made sense in his mind. "Fools fly high," he muttered and stopped his walk down the pasture. He had already come far enough for take-off. That is, his wheels would be off the ground by the time he reached here. Beyond? Well, the field seemed clear. He'd gamble on it.

He felt a reckless assurance in his ability. It was all a gamble, anyway, this flying. He turned back, aware that his shoes and the cuffs of his trousers were soaked with the night dew. He didn't mind

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this. He didn't mind anything. He was feeling grand.

THEY had finished filling the gas tanks and had the caps screwed on. Al Bibbs was staggering around the engine, trying to find a place to put the gallon of lubricating oil they had brought. Evidently the two of them had been adding to the moonshine already inside them.

Moore showed Bibbs where the oil went. He climbed onto the wing and from there out onto the engine, one foot on a drag wire, the other knee on the rocker-arms. "Hand me that can of water."

Tom stumbled toward the old Packard. He came back with the water can. Moore thought for a time that he was going to miss his bearings entirely and walk past the ship. "You two're drunk as hell," Moore accused them. "Here! Hand it up here." He saw then that Tom had lost his glasses.

He filled the radiator and got the cap back on. He started to climb down. His foot skidded down the drag wire and he fell, the can of water splashing him. It was annoying. But it wasn't because he was drunk. He'd seen mechanics do the same thing. Trouble was he didn't have quite enough for a fine flying edge.

"Any more of that moon left?" he asked.

They were all friendly again, standing in front of the plane and finishing off a half-pint that Bibbs had.

"The bes' airplane pilot in the world." Al said, raising the bottle.

"I shaid that," Tom claimed. "Didn't I, Dan? I wass the firs' to shay it."

"Who blocked those wheels?' Dan asked. "There's two airplane men aroun' here."

"I did," Al told him proudly. "I'm—I helped that other airplane pilot. I'm the besh airplane engine starter in the world."

Tom was examining the stars through the empty pint bottle.

"Then prove it," Dan challenged and went around, to climb into the front cockpit. He paused with one foot lifted to the walkway and ran his hand along the trailing edge of the upper wing. He smelled of it. "How much of that gasoline did you spill?" he shouted.

Bibbs was already turning the propeller to prime cylinders. "Not much," he said. He stopped working the propeller. "What's itch t'you? Itch my gasoline. I furnis'ed it, didn't I?"

Moore squeezed in under the wing. "An' I'll burn in it, maybe. Switch is off—gas on; if that means anything to yuh."

Al might not be the best airplane engine starter in the world but they finally got the OX turning over. Things were happening in a dreamy, effortless way. Moore's safety belt was clasped, though he couldn't remember doing this.

He tried to read his instruments. He could see their dark circles, clearly outlined by the moonlight but couldn't tell one from the other except for their size.

Time was an uncertain quantity. He didn't know whether the engine had been running ten minutes or a half-hour. He shouted for Al to pull the blocks and he taxied to the end of the pasture nearest the shed.

He blasted her around, easing the stick forward to get the drag of tail-skid off the ground. Then he shoved the throttle forward.

THE fence line ran by him on the left side. He could feel the control surfaces getting a bite into the air. It bounced a few times and he was off the ground.

Perhaps it was the rush of cold wind. Or the feel of power under his hands. Or it might have been the knowledge of danger. At any rate all the liquor seemed to go out of his head.

He thought he was cold sober till he started turning to the left. A side rush of wind told him that he'd used too much stick or not enough rudder. The ground rushed up to meet the wing tip.

He over-controlled in correcting and

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the nose came up. The engine labored in a stall. He shot the nose down, leveling wings. He was diving toward a clump of trees.

He pulled it back, easy this time. The ship took a slight climbing attitude. His hand on the control stick was dripping with sweat.

The field must be some place back of him. He flew ahead for a while, still climbing. The main streets of Alcova were under his left wing, the river to his right.

The sight of the bridge oriented his mind and put him at ease. He could always pick up the main road from there and follow it back to locate the pasture with the shed and the car in it.

He wasn't doing so badly. In fact, he was doing very well. There weren't so many pilots who could take a strange ship up at night off a strange field. There probably weren't a dozen pilots in the whole country who could do it.

Those two fellows back there were drunk. So drunk that they'd probably think this was a dream when they woke up tomorrow. It was a shame to waste this exhibition. There should be some sober people to witness it. Make it a matter of record.

Moore turned. He must have two thousand feet now. Maybe only fifteen hundred.

Carbon street lamps made a pattern below him. That was Alcova, where old Tallow lived. Tom said he practically owned the place. He owned this ship, too. Well, he didn't own him, Moore. The Army didn't own him, either. Nobody owned him. He'd show them.

He thrust his right hand forward and the lights swung from beneath him until they were right in front of the ship's nose.

He pulled it out of the dive at one side of the town and held it level, just over the roof tops. He pulled it up in a climbing turn and swung back over the town. Lights were coming on in some of the buildings.

TOM couldn't doubt his flying now. Neither could Al Bibbs. He'd show these farmers a few things. He put it into a left vertical turn over the main part of town. He could lay his cheek against the cowling pad and look to the side and see the twin lights of automobiles. Only, of course, he was looking straight down. That was because a man sat horizontally when he was in a vertical turn.

I a loop a man sat upside down. He climbed a little and tried that. The sky swung around to take the place of the ground. He tilted his head back, looking straight upward and saw the ground. Only he was looking straight down because he was sitting upside down.

It was a good ship. It was a damned good ship. He tried a wingover and stalled and came near falling into a tail-spin. It wasn't as good a ship as he'd thought.

You couldn't do a split-arc with it. Probably pull the wings off. Or jerk the struts from their fittings. Nevertheless he knew he was going to try one, even before he kicked full rudder and jerked the stick.

That was a near thing. He was down below the level of the business houses before the old ship got flying speed enough to climb out of the hole.

Then he smelled the stink of burning oil. He straightened out and searched for the main road. It was to his right and the river was over that way. He was flying north and the field was south of town. There weren't many seconds left him to reach it.

That was one of the nastiest things that could happen to a man. To catch fire in the air. He remembered the gasoline Bibbs had spilled. But that should be dried out by this time.

He jammed stick and rudder. River and road were to his left now. The first lick of flame he saw he'd stall it into the river.

He was surprised to see a lot of automobile lights ahead of him; surprised to

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see that they were shining crossways of the road.

That was about where the field should be. Of course! They'd heard him flying and came out to light the field for him to land.

But most likely he wouldn't reach the field. That must be a broken oil line. She'd catch fire or a piston would seize from lack of lubrication.

Ten or fifteen seconds more and he'd be able to glide in. Better hold the engine on a little longer. It was easier to slip off extra altitude than try and get a bad engine to pull you in at the last second.

He could make it now, easily. Careful, or he might overshoot the pasture and crash in at the other end. Too bad they couldn't put brakes on an airplane.

The best way was to watch those lights. When they got almost level with him that'd be the time to flatten out of the sideslip. He'd leave on some rudder and fishtail it to kill speed.

The movements came automatically. He leveled it and kicked broadside to line-of-flight. The controls were getting slack from loss of flying speed. He kicked opposite rudder, straightening. He started a back-travel on the stick, to get the tail down.

Wheels touched lightly, then tailskid. Almost a three-point landing!

She started to groundloop. He jabbed the throttle, throwing propeller blast to stop the sudden turn.

Speed slackened. He let it come to almost a dead stop before he started to turn back toward the shed. Had to be careful now. He'd used up all his luck for that night.

CHAPTER XIV

ARREST THAT HERO

MEN collected around the plane as he cut the switch in front of the hangar. He started to get out but was held to the seat by his safety belt. He unclasped this and stood up.

The lights of the cars seemed to be going around in circles, making dips and side turns. Lord, he was drunk! But he was glad he'd made the flight. This was the way to arrive in a new place. Show 'em what you could do.

The wing walkway was slippery. He skidded down it, trying to catch his balance. He saved himself from falling, but one foot broke through the wing fabric, between ribs.

The people came crowding in a circle that held back a little, silent. A man came through this to meet him. He was wearing a dark-colored uniform coat that was only partly buttoned; that had a badge on the left chest. Al Bibbs and Tom Dawson broke through the circle, tagging behind the man in the uniform coat.

"You're under arrest," the man said. "You're under arrest for disturbing the peace and for stealing Bert Tallerand's airplane and—"

Al Bibbs had caught up with him. He jerked the man around by his shoulder and swung. The man wilted down. "You ain't arrestin' Dan," Bibbs said. He talked as if he were cold sober.

Tom Dawson repeated his words: "You ain't arrestin' Dan." He turned to face the circle of people. "There ain't enough of you in Alcova to arrest old Dan," he told them.

The circle became confused and started to mill around. Other men were advancing from it. They paired off for Bibbs and Dawson.

Moore had been leaning back against the fuselage. He shoved himself erect, shook his head to try and clear it. He got to Dawson about the same time the two men reached him.

Al Bibbs hadn't waited for the attack. He'd charged forward to meet it, arms swinging.

Dan whipped his right into the face of the lead man. Tom was pawing around with his open hands as if he were in pitch darkness instead of this bright moonlight. Dan saw that he

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wasn't going to be much good in the fight.

The other man took a poke at Tom's stomach. Tom doubled up and Moore tried to get to the other man over his friend's body.

He caught him a light blow at the end of his reach. The other fellow didn't know anything about fighting. He was swinging wildly with both fists.

Dan crowded past Tom and got set. Tom straightened up suddenly and swung with all he had. And his fist exploded against Dan's left eye.

Tom had deliberately socked him! Then Dan remembered. Tom had lost his spectacles. He must be blind as a bat without them.

Dan stumbled, yelling something, and then his thoughts ended abruptly.

DAN felt the back of his head. There was a lump on it as big as a goose egg. He opened his eyes and stared at heavy chicken wire that bulged downward in the center. He closed his eyes and tried to reconstruct things.

He'd made a night flight with an airplane. People came out to meet him. One of them tried to arrest him. There was a fight. Dan explored his left eye with fingertips. It was swollen. By this time it would be good and purple. But there wasn't much pain in it.

"You awake?"

Dan opened his eyes and looked toward the sound. There was a double-deck bunk across from him, made of iron pipe with chicken wire stretched across it for springs. A man lay on the lower bunk on his side, staring at him. It was Al Bibbs.

Tom Dawson's voice came from some place above: "A part of my head just dropped onto the floor. Please don't kick it around too much, gentlemen."

Dan sat up and got his feet on the deck. "Must be a bad storm outside. Reminds me of the little fruit boat that took us overseas."

"It's the jail house," Al corrected him. "The Alcova hoosegow."

"You fellas comin' out of it?" An old man with a protruding witch's chin, stared at them through bars at the end of the cell. "'Bout time. One o'clock an' you got callers."

"Callers?" The chicken wire stirred above Dan. Tom's legs appeared over the side. He made a big job of getting to the floor. "If they're from Selma, send 'em in. If they're from Alcova, tell 'em to go to — I beg your pardon!"

Dan got to his feet with a shock of wonder. Theresa Hoyt was out there!

It could very easily be a dream. She was too beautiful, too composed and unconcerned, to be real. In fact she was smiling. And this was no time to smile.

"Hello, Dan," she said casually. "Did you get it out of your system?"

He got up slowly and moved toward the barred door.

"What an eye! Do you do this sort of thing often?"

He could see her face better now. It was very pale so he noticed a light sprinkling of freckles over the bridge of her nose. He understood that this casual, hardboiled manner was an act that she was putting on. A movement of revulsion passed over her face and she stepped back as he approached the door.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

SHE kept her light, unconcerned manner. "We heard that Mr. Tallerand had an airplane he might sell. I stopped off to see about it."

"Where's he?"

She considered this, face tilted thoughtfully. "Well, I can't say, exactly. Some place west of Chicago."

Dan wet his lips. "He went on and you stopped off here to buy an airplane?"

"Your mind works fast, considering your condition—considering the condition you appear to be in." Her voice was cutting. "I just stopped by. Thought you might be able to tell me how much that plane is worth."

"You get on a train and get outa here,"

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he commanded. "That plane's not worth the gasoline to burn it up."

"Mr. Tallerand says it's worth a thousand dollars."

"Trick, it's not worth— Listen, Trick, the Army hangars are full of those war training planes. They cost the government plenty, a whole heck of a lot more than a thousand. But that doesn't mean they're worth a thousand dollars now."

She lowered her voice, moved a little nearer the bars. "How much is it *really* worth, Dan?"

He passed a hand over his throbbing forehead. It was wet with perspiration. "I don't know. I didn't get much of a look at it."

"But you flew it." She was looking at him with an impersonal curiosity, as though he were some kind of queer animal.

"Yes, I flew it," he admitted. "But there're a thousand things that could be wrong with it."

Her voice dropped lower. "Well, say there were. How much would it be worth then?"

"I wouldn't pay over two hundred and fifty for it. Not that much. I think I burned the engine out last night. Oil line broke."

"Tallerand said he paid Al Bibbs to overhaul it. Bought some new bearings and valves and all new rings. You couldn't have hurt it so very much last night."

"But if you got it, Trick, you'd have to disassemble and crate it for freighting. And the freight bill alone would be more than it's worth."

"I see," she nodded, as though convinced. She looked him over. "Does your eye hurt?"

"No. No, I'm all right, Trick. You just clear out of here and forget about me."

Her lips curved in a small smile. "That would be just dandy, if it were possible. But I can't forget you, and I don't want to remember you as you are now."

He didn't know what to make of that. Certainly it wasn't a declaration of affection.

"Don't you want to get out of here?"

He looked about the small, bare room. Al and Tom had moved discreetly to the other end. "I've been in better places," he confessed. "But I'll get out of here without your help."

"I don't know about that. They've got some pretty serious charges against you."

He took this in silence.

"Dan," she spoke in a pleading voice, "I can get you out of here. You and your friends, too." She was going to say more, but stopped, seeing the stubborn pride in his face. She gave a helpless little gesture with her hands. She moved away from him and down the corridor without saying goodbye.

AL BIBBS came over. "Are you nutty?" he demanded. "If an angel like that wanted to get me outta jail—or *in* jail, for that matter, I'd jump at the chance."

"There's a string tied to it," Dan told him. "She and her brother want me to organize a flying circus with them. If she got me out of here I'd have to do that."

"Then you'd have to associate with her. That'd be awful!" Bibbs said, with deep sarcasm.

"I'm through with flying. It's only fools who fly."

"No wonder you're so good at it," Bibbs snapped, turning abruptly to the other end of the room, studying the barred window.

"Did you overhaul that airplane engine for Tallow?" Moore asked him.

"Yep. That engine's in first-class shape. Gimme a leg up here."

Dan boosted him up to the high, grated window.

"Same one I jerked out with the old Packard, worst luck. She's in solid with concrete now."

"We might set fire to the bedding," Tom suggested.

"An' smother to death," Al said. "You an' your wild West ideas!"

"It was just a suggestion," Tom meekly defended.

"A damn' poor one, if you ask me." He

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raised his voice to shout: "Hey, does anybody ever get anythin' to eat in this louse hole?"

Black coffee and toast and a quantity of eggs were brought to them after a long wait. The eggs had been fried to the firmness and texture of gutta-percha.

Al watched Dan stow away four of them. "No wonder you're big," he growled. "You must have a cast-iron stomach."

There was a clatter of keys at the door. "More company?" Tom asked.

The door swung open. The old turnkey looked them over, chewing his toothless gums. "All right, boys," he announced. "You're free."

A middle-aged man stood in the corridor facing the open door, clad in a neat, double-breasted blue serge. He had his hat off. His head was covered with a handsome thatch of white hair.

"The devil himself," Tom muttered. "Old Tallow!"

Bert Tallerand stepped forward with extended hand. "You are Mr. Moore, aren't you?" he asked, in a soft, cathedral voice, ignoring the others. "I'm Mr. Tallerand. Bert Tallerand."

DAN shook hands with him automatically, his mind frozen with surprise From Dawson's description he hadn't expected Tallerand to be this sort at all. And it appeared that they were to be set free.

"Miss Hoyt told me about you," Tallerand said, teetering up and down on his toes. "Sorry—very sorry I was delayed in having you released."

He raised his voice slightly, glancing toward Dawson and Bibbs. "I've just been selling my airplane—that plane you flew last night—to Miss Hoyt. She told me you were looking for a—er—newspaper position."

"She bought that airplane!" Dan exclaimed. "For how much?"

Tallerand beamed candid good humor. "Under the circumstance I—er—sold it for less than I had been expecting. Nine hundred and fifty dollars."

"Nine hundred and fifty dollars!"

"Yes." Tallerand made a deprecating gesture. "Under the circumstances I didn't feel like asking the full price."

"Under the circumstances! In other words the price included releasing us from jail."

"Now, now, Mr. Moore, I wouldn't put it that way. Let's say that it just included the damage you boys did. The rest—well, just fun. Nobody was hurt, to speak of."

Moore was furious. Not at Tallerand. He seemed to have acted in good faith. But Theresa Hoyt had deliberately placed him under obligation by paying that much for the airplane.

"There's a girl for a man," Tom Dawson remarked. "The kind you read about in story books. Al, we'd better get back to work." He extended his hand. "Had a good time at your party, Dan. And you've got your newspaper job. Rivals after this, but always friends, eh?"

Al didn't shake hands; didn't even say goodbye. "I'm goin' to find that girl," he declared. "She'll need help."

Of course she'd need help, Moore thought. The little witch had planned it this way. He'd have to help her in the end, but it would be just as well to let her worry for a while.

"What about this newspaper job?" he asked Tallerand.

The man pursed his lips. "Of course I don't know how much experience you've had on country newspapers. But the sky's the limit, so far as advancement is concerned."

Moore forgot his headache in the warm glow of that promise. It was exactly what he wanted. A chance to prove his worth, in something besides flying.

"You could demonstrate your ability in a couple of weeks," Tallerand continued. "Say we try it out. Two weeks without pay. I'll furnish a room for you and there'll be a little Ford bug to get around in."

"Lead on," Dan agreed. "That sounds fair to me."

Doubts assailed him at first sight of the

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newspaper office. It was smaller and, if anything, dingier, than that of the Selma *Bugle*.

"This will be your office," Tallerand cheerily informed him, opening the door into a dusty cubicle and pushing a sack of potatoes to one side. "You can clean it up an fix it to your liking. You may have a little trouble with that typewriter for a while. Good stout machine, though."

He rubbed his hands together, rinsing them in the air. "And now I'll introduce you to Blowser, our printer. He can answer any questions you have. You see, I'll be away most of the time." He beamed at Moore. "Wonderful opportunity here, my boy."

CHAPTER XV

GENTLEMAN OF THE PRESS

MOORE'S illusions crumbled, one by one, during the following week. He bought a pair of coveralls and cleaned up his office. It took him all that day. Blowser, a dried-up, taciturn little mummy, stopped at the door several times, peering at Moore's activities over his steel-rimmed glasses, his face expressing astonished disapproval.

Late in the evening he showed Moore where he was to sleep. It was an army cot in the basement, surrounded by dust-rimmed printing stock, sacks of potatoes half-sprouted and mildewed corn.

"There's some old sacks back of the furnace, if yuh need beddin'," Blowser informed him.

Moore thought there must be some mistake. But there was no good in protesting to Blowser. The little man was already mounting the ramshackle stairs. "I'll want you tuh clean up the hellbox, come tomorry," he stated, over his shoulder.

Moore got himself a room at the Hotel Alcova. He would wait for Bert Tallerand's return before making any fuss about that cellar.

The next morning he and Blowser cleaned up the hellbox, melted lead and cast it for the linotype. After that Dan helped cut some paper. The screw sleeve was cracked so he had to use a crowbar for leverage to cramp the paper while Blowser cut. Then Blowser put him to sorting out some mixed type fonts, but called him from this to carry in a half-dozen sacks of potatoes, trade payment for a subcription bill.

Moore carried the sacks in, then washed up at the sink and took off his coveralls.

"Hey, I ain't finished back here yet," Blowser shrilled.

"Well, I am," Moore told him, and went up to his "office."

He found some back issues of the four-page paper and waded through them. There was a running story about the Formler swamp dike. He'd get into that later, when he had time for a little leg work. The paper went to press on Thursday and he'd found some church, marriage and obituary items in a basket in Tallerand's office. He rolled paper into the old typewriter and started in on these, using back issues of the Alcova *News* for style.

Tom Dawson called on him that evening at the hotel, bringing a friend and some more of his copper-colored whisky. The friend was a photographer, apparently a good one, who was home from Springfield, getting over an attack of flu. Dan refused to talk about his work but they had a good time, drinking a little and reviewing the now-famous night flight.

THE next day he finished with what news material he could find in the office. He stretched a wedding announcement out to two pages of double-spaced copy, trying to give it color. He struggled to put some life into the dead factual announcement of a son born to Walter H. Eggerton.

In his search for news items he'd run across an editorial that Bert Tallerand had written for the coming issue. It was devoted to a rambling, incoherent attack on the evil doings of the present state legislature and to open praises of one Albert Tallerand, "That courageous

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citizen" who, as the next state senator, would correct those evils.

Dan was reading this, feeling slightly nauseated, when he heard a prolonged blasphemous cackling from Blowser, in the next room. His withered face appeared at the door. "Where's that news basket?" he demanded.

Dan pointed to the wire basket he'd found in Tallerand's office. "Right here," he said, and laid the editorial and his own work on top of it.

Blowser pawed through this, pausing at times to read a few lines. "What in the gosh heck is this?"

Moore shrugged. "Same thing, written up, ready to set."

Blowser stared at him, his nose and upper lip twitching with emotion. "Looka here, young feller," he croaked, pounding his flat chest. "I write up this here paper. On the linotype."

Dan nodded. "It reads just that way," he agreed

Blowser wadded the copy sheets. "And it's agoin' tuh keep on readin' thataway," he stated, hand raised, clutching the paper.

Moore stood up. "You throw that in the waste basket," he threatened, "and I'll ram it down your skinny throat." He looked beyond Blowser and saw Tallerand at the door, smiling in a sympathetic way as though he witnessed a children's quarrel.

"Now, now," Tallerand chided, coming into the room. He took the copy paper from the old man. "You run along, Ed, and get busy."

MOORE sat down, smiling at his own temper. He didn't care whether they ran his copy or not. But a man had to try, if he was going to learn this game.

Tallerand was running through the sheets. "This is good," he said. "Very good."

"Your printer didn't seem to think so."

"Blowser?" Tallerand winked at Moore. "You know how that is," he said in a lowered voice. "Old man's been with me a long time, Moore. Of course, when you get straightened around and acquainted, you'll be handling all this stuff."

Moore studied his candid blue eyes and felt his doubts lessen. There was no use in quibbling over trifles. "I've been reading over back issues of the *News*," he said.

"Fine! And what did you think of them?"

Moore hesitated. "Well," he said, "to tell the truth, one issue is about the same as the next."

Tallerand looked troubled. "Of course, Moore, this isn't a big city daily."

"Oh, sure. I know that. But look here. Pages four, five and six are almost entirely boiler plate; mat service from New York—just canned news. For instance, this story about the head-dress of Aztec Indians—seems as though we could find something more interesting to the farmers around here."

"Well, now, perhaps we could," Tallerand conceded.

Moore was delighted that Tallerand was the kind who could take criticism and welcome suggestions.

"My idea," he continued, with growing enthusiasm, "was to use those pages in meeting our own problems—the things right here in town and the surrounding country. Farm problems and that sort of thing. We could get dope from the county agent and from the state agricultural college."

"Why, say, that's a splendid idea!" Tallerand moved to the window and stood there, rubbing his hands in thought. "Of course you'd have to find out what those problems are," he said, over his shoulder.

He came back to face Moore. "Tell you what. Why don't you go out and get acquainted with the farmers hereabouts?"

"That's the idea." Dan nodded.

"And while you're at it," Tallerand enlarged on his idea, "you might as well

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be renewing subscriptions, selling new ones and collecting for those overdue."

"Yes," Moore agreed, a little doubtfully, "yes, I suppose I might."

"Well, then, that's all arranged." Tallerand seemed to be shaking hands with himself. "And by the way, Moore, I'd appreciate having you refer to me as Senator, when you're talking with the farmers. I'm running for the state senate, you know. Doesn't do any harm getting them used to the idea, eh?"

Dan sat, staring thoughtfully at the door through which Tallerand had departed. "Either you're playing on the level with me, *Senator,*" he mused, aloud "or you're going to wish you had."

CHAPTER XVI

CALL THAT A PLANE?

MOORE learned a lot during the next days, traveling dusty farm roads in the Ford. The machine had been stripped to its bare essentials and indifferently cowled in with unpainted sheet iron. He came back to his hotel room each night, covered with dust, depressed in spirit and with increased ire.

Tallerand, old Tallow, was all that Tom Dawson and Al Bibbs had painted him. There was hardly a farmer who hadn't been cheated by him in some fashion; through his broom factory, that purchased straw from some of them; his implement house or his so-called coöperative feed and seed concern.

And yet, strangely, they all favored him for state senator. Ben Lyon, editor of the Selma *Bugle,* was dismissed as a contender. He was a college man and he was too goodnatured and joky. Tallerand was sharp. He wasn't afraid of nothin'. He'd have nerve enough to talk up to them smart alecks in Springfield.

Something had to be done about that. But in the meantime Dan had been neglecting Thesesa Hoyt. He hadn't even seen her since that afternoon at the city jail.

That next afternoon he stopped by the field where Tallerand had built his airplane shed. The gate was closed, so he left his car outside. As he approached on foot he saw the airplane, in front of the shed, its right wing panel removed.

He thought for a moment that she was having it disassembled for shipment. But the panel had been taken apart. There was a new fabric covering on the lower wing. It was propped up on the leading edge. Al Bibbs sat on an apple box, facing it, his back toward him. He was in the act of pushing a long needle through the wing, ribstitching it.

"Where in thunder did you get that wing fabric?" Moore demanded.

Bibbs lifted his head and looked him over with cold eyes. "She got it," he said shortly.

Theresa Hoyt, hearing his voice had stood up, her head showing above the screen of the wing. She wore a dark green beret and somehow seemed changed in appearance.

"Hello, Dan," she said. There was a smudge of grease on her nose. She smiled in a friendly way, as if she had forgotten the past.

LOOKING at her, Dan felt a strange lifting of spirit. He was like a tired man relieved of his burden; like a man who has been groping around in a dark, dusty place to emerge into open sunlight. He laughed, unaware that it was the first natural laughter he'd had for many days. "Wherever you got that cloth, it was stolen," he accused.

"No," she corrected him. "Chiseled. I wired Mike Deniski and he chiseled it for me. It's some sort of way they have of getting things in the Army. He said the government had so much of this war stuff left over that it was rotting."

"That's right," Dan agreed. He pressed his fingers against the new fabric. "A little tight, maybe. The dope'll shrink it to beat thunder."

"That's what I told her," Al broke in.

Trick giggled. "And I've been afraid it was too loose. I sewed it myself. I'm

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rooming and boarding with a grand lady who lets me use her sewing machine. What's this for, Dan?"

She bent down, disappearing behind the wing, and came erect, a narrow roll of cloth in her hand.

"Pinked tape, you goose. After you get through rib-stitching it you dope that on to cover the thread."

"Oh. Mike sent a lot of stuff and wrote out the directions. Guess he thought I'd know enough to do that."

Dan walked around the plane, examining it. She followed him. "That lower right was the one the cows licked. They must like the taste of dope. Gosh, Dan! I don't see how you ever got it up in the air."

"Who made this patch?" he asked, pointing to the fuselage.

"I did," she admitted. "Pretty bad, isn't it?"

"Bad! It's impossible. You don't sew a patch on, Trick. You just scrape the old dope off and whip the hole together and dope on a fresh piece of linen."

"But, Dan, I scraped and scraped! By the time I got the old dope off I'd scraped clear though the cloth."

He took off his coat, rolled his sleeves up. "Where's that dope?" he asked. "You smear fresh dope on first, Trick. That cuts through the old, like a varnish remover."

He worked with them the rest of the afternoon, mending small holes and rips in the fuselage and left wing panel.

"I'll be back tomorrow," he promised, when they were ready to leave. "There's no big rush about the work I'm on now. Why not ride into town with me, Trick?"

She climbed into the narrowed bucket seat. "Red and I fixed up one of these bugs," she said, comfortably. "Lots of fun. Why can't we take a little ride, Dan?"

The idea had struck him at the same moment. "Sure we can," he agreed. "If you don't mind a little dust and a few bugs in your eyes."

SHE was silent for a long time, leaning back in the seat, enjoying the cool flow of air. Moore studied her with side glances. She had a determined little chin. Her nose was slightly up-tilted but it would be a crime to call it snubbed.

"How is the work, Dan?" she asked, without turning her head.

"Fine, Trick! Just fine. But to be right honest with you, I've been worried about this airplane."

She put her hand on his arm. "Don't do that, Dan. I'm perfectly all right—me and my airplane."

"No you're not, Trick. You got cheated on that deal. And it was because of me. I'm going to make up the difference, as soon as I get a little money ahead."

She studied him with a lazy, calculating side glance. Her eyelashes were unusually thick and jet black, contrasting with the gray eyes; framing them. He realized, breathlessly, that she was an extremely beautiful woman.

"Would you be able to pay a little now?" she inquired. "Say, two hundred dollars?"

He swallowed. He had less than four hundred dollars to his name. "Yes," he said, stiffly. "Yes, I'll bring a check out tomorrow."

"That's fine," she said, composedly.

He had to laugh at her cool nerve. "You're a good business woman, Trick. You don't beat around the bush."

"Yes," she admitted. "I'm not bad. How about you, Dan? Are you a very good business man?"

"What do you mean by that?"

She spoke, staring straight ahead into the glowing twilight. "I can see how Army men would get to be—well, sort of childish. About things outside the Army, I mean. I think you'd be even worse than the average. You're sort of—oh, goodnatured and honest and forthright."

"What are you getting at?" he demanded, slowing the car.

She faced him then, squarely. Her voice was husky. "I'm trying to tell you, Dan, that Bert Tallerand is making a fool of you. No, wait a minute," she stopped his protests. "I wanted him to make a fool of you. I wanted him to pat you on the back

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and slobber over you and *use* you. Like he did the man who had your place before."

"You've been talking to Al Bibbs?"

"Yes. Al and Tom Dawson. And a lot of other people. Can't you see, Dan, that he's just a human bloodsucker? All he cares about is money and power. I knew that within ten minutes after meeting him. That's why I—" She stopped herself. "Anyway," she added, "he'd sell his shriveled-up little soul a dozen times for this state senatorship he's after. Yes, and then sell the people out when he gets it."

HE STOPPED the car and backed and turned it around. "I'll take you home now," he said.

"All right, Dan," she agreed, in a meek voice. And then, fiercely: "But I found out that I didn't want you to be shamed, Dan. You're too free and reckless and—yes, and you're splendid, in a way. You make me think of a big, grizzly bear that's been wounded and caged. You're just butting your head against iron bars, not knowing what's happened to you."

"In other words, not very smart."

"No, Dan. Just not smart in a mean, tricky way." There were angry tears in her eyes. "Now, for heaven's sakes, don't think I like you, or admire you! Not like other men. More like that poor, caged bear—a splendid machine, going to waste."

He stopped the car abruptly. She stiffened for a moment in his arms and then relaxed. Her lips were cool and soft against his.

She held to him like a child, after his own arms had loosened. "You bobbed your hair, didn't you, Trick?" he said, feeling its silkiness against his cheek. "That's why you looked different to me today."

She pushed back from him. "Yes." Her voice was a little broken. She produced a handkerchief from somewhere. "It got in the way and it was hot. Dan?"

"Yes?"

"You mustn't remember about this. I don't love you the least bit. I'm afraid of you and I think maybe I hate you." She studied his face. "What sort of person are you, anyway?" she demanded. "You drink and gamble and—and you don't give a tinker's damn whether you live or die!"

"Maybe," he agreed, the hard smile coming to his lips. "You don't fly through a war and kill men without it doing something to you."

"I suppose not. Well, tonight I was just lonesome, I guess. I suppose if the corner cop had put his arms around me, I'd have done the same thing. Seems like women have to cry a little now and then."

"It seems so," he agreed coldly. "And now I really will take you home."

He left her at a rambling old house at the edge of town, where she was rooming and boarding. He was going over to see Tom Dawson and his photographer friend. Something that she had said had started a plan vaguely forming in his mind.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FLYING SENATOR

TRICK HOYT maintained a friendly aloofness toward Moore during the following days. She watched him, though, while he was working over the plane. He was spending all of his time with them now and after the first day she'd started bringing a lunch for him as well as Al Bibbs. He seemed to be as happy and carefree as a boy out of school.

With his assistance they made astonishing progress. He worked by himself, but he was there to help with any problems that arose. Could they paint the ship with ordinary oil paint? Yes. But they couldn't put lacquer or dope over oil paint.

In the meantime he had the fuselage turtleback off, tightening brace wires, checking control guides and cables. And he superintended the doping of the newly covered wing and getting the panel assembled and on the ship and rigged.

Al Bibbs was a good mechanic and an all-around handy man, but Trick realized that without Moore's help they couldn't have gotten the plane together and in shape to fly.

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On his advice they enameled the wings a dark brown, the struts and fuselage dark green. Those colors would hide the patches and show less soil.

Tuesday night, after they'd finished with the first coat, Trick's landlady gave her a copy of the Selma *Bugle* and there, spread over most of the front page, was an announcement that Ben Lyon, editor of the *Bugle*, was considering the daring plan of using an airplane in his campaign for state senator.

She read the story over twice and read between the lines. Then she got out telegrams she had received from her brother and from Captain Patrick and Mike Deniski. She had made them promises—all of them. And she was going to fail!

The next morning Dan read the paper, when she handed it to him. "I've been wondering why you were so happy," she said, knowing there was spitefulness in her voice. "You're going to fly Mr. Lyon's plane, aren't you?"

He looked at her, grinning, "Why no," he denied, "I'm working for Bert Tallerand, the man who'd sell his soul a dozen times to become senator."

She had been afraid he would take the job and leave her stranded with the airplane. Now she was afraid he'd continue working for Tallerand. "Dan, you *must* take that job," she insisted. "It's just the thing for you."

"Well," he shrugged, "in the first place, Lyon hasn't asked me to fly for him. In the second place he hasn't got an airplane yet. And then in the third place, I've got other plans."

She couldn't keep the eagerness from her voice. "What are they, Dan? Will you fly for—"

His voice broke in coldly. "I'm going to fly tests on this crate," he said, "providing you'll loan it to me afterward for a little flying of my own."

"Of course, Dan. Anything. You own—that is, you gave me that two hundred dollars."

"And then," he ended, "I'm goin' to hop the bumpers out to California. That's the homing loft for pilots. I'll send one of 'em back, to take care of flying this crate to Idaho for you."

She hated him after that. And she hated him more when the Alcova *News* came out on Thursday with the announcement that Bert Tallerand, "that sterling citizen, the iron man who would fight to the last ditch for his people," had accepted the implied challenge of Ben Lyon, "the college boy from Selma," and would himself campaign by air, flown by none other than Daniel Moore, famous war ace. Altogether the story bristled with aggressiveness, like one of the war pronouncements by Kaiser Wilhelm.

TRICK went out to the field in Al Bibbs' old Packard the next day and waited in stony silence while they warmed up the engine. There hadn't been any broken oil lines on it. Al had simply filled its crankcase too full that night.

It seemed months since Dan had made that crazy night flight. She looked up at the sky, that was darkening with rain clouds. The drab, clammy day suited her mood exactly. Tomorrow Dan was going to take Tallerand up on his first campaign flight. And before taking him he was going to give a stunting exhibition. There would be a big crowd out to see that.

She looked at the Curtiss airplane, trying to recapture some of the thrill that she'd had in the thought of owning one. It was a beautiful thing.

Dan Moore sat in the front cockpit, looking queerly unearthly in his helmet and goggles. He was warming the engine up slowly, carefully. The plane really was beautiful. It quivered with life. It gleamed with the rich colors of the new paint.

And she hated it, and hated him. Tomorrow he was going to take that human bloodsucker up in it. He was going to help him win votes from these people. There wasn't a doubt but what

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that show tomorrow would mean the election of Bert Tallerand to the state senate.

Dan motioned for the blocks to be pulled from in front of the wheels. She saw the white flash of his teeth and then he was humped over the control stick, face intent over the left cowling, as the plane gathered speed.

Al Bibbs came back to stand beside her, still holding one of the four-by-four wheel blocks. There was awe in his voice: "I used to read about that fella in the papers, during the war," he said. "I always wondered—"

"Wondered what, Al?"

"I dunno. Wondered, I guess, what sort of person could do—do the crazy things he did. There was that line of observation balloons he shot down. Did you read about that?"

"Yes, Al, I read about that. I think I sort of worshiped him then. The way Red did."

"Five of 'em. An' right over the enemy artillery! That's when he came down in no-man's land, with one wing almost shot off."

"Al, I—I feel a little sick. D'you mind if I borrow your car? That—*fool* up there can bring you in."

THE rain held off that night. The next day was sultry and oppressive, but this had no affect on the crowd that started collecting at the field by eight o'clock in the morning.

The small boys came first, then automoblies and horse-drawn carriages began arriving, with grown-ups and very small children and picnic lunches. The majority of them had never before seen an airplane on the ground, at close quarters.

One little man in shiny blue serge, who had rushed the season with a flat-brimmed straw hat, approached Dan as soon as he got out of his car.

"Are you carrying passengers, Mr. Moore?" he inquired. His pale, round face showed intense seriousness. "I mean, for money?"

"Not for money, marbles or chalk," Dan told him, unlocking the shed doors. He saw that the man's hands were clenching and unclenching with suppressed nervousness.

"I mean . . ." the man cleared his throat, "I mean for quite a bit of money." He took a billfold from his pocket. His hands were trembling and Dan saw in his eyes a desperate longing.

It brought sharply to his mind a gangling, awkward youth who had pedaled his bicycle fourteen miles over a dusty road; who had sat all day on a fence, without lunch, waiting for an airplane to fly.

The picture faded. "Sorry," he said bruskly, "no passengers."

"That was Mr. White," Al Bibbs told him, while they were getting the plane out. "He's the high-school superintendent. Funny he'd want to fly. The kids all call him Lily-livered White."

Trick Hoyt came over to the plane, while they were checking the gas and oil and water. "A lot of these people want to fly," she said stiffly, questioning him with cool, impersonal eyes.

"What of it?" Dan asked.

Her voice was sharp. "They'll pay ten dollars apiece for a ride. Ten-dollar bills don't grow on trees."

It hit him all of a sudden. Why shouldn't he carry passengers? He wasn't in the Army any more. "All right, send 'em along," he agreed.

Mr. White, the school superintendent, was his first passenger.

HE CLIMBED, circled Alcova and landed back in the pasture. Ten dollars. There was another man waiting and Trick Hoyt pushed a rumpled ten-dollar bill into his hand. Again he circled and landed and again there was a passenger waiting. And two five-dollar bills.

There was something intoxicating about the experience. He was getting paid for having fun; paid immediately, in tangible greenbacks. There was no wind on the ground. Unconsciously he picked up a barnstormer's trick; taking off to the

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south, landing to the north. It saved time in taxying. Time was money. A dollar a minute. More than that.

Al Bibbs stepped up on the wing walk-strip, cupped his hands to shout above the engine noise. "Mr. White wants to do the loop-the-loop. He'll pay you whatever you ask, in reason. The little gent's crazy. He'll spend all the money he made last winter."

Moore sat for a moment in silence, as though he hadn't heard the words. Then: "Put him in. It won't cost him a cent."

Al's long, dour face expressed astonishment. His mouth widened into a smile. "Sometimes," he said, "I almost like you."

Bert Tallerand came out to the field as Dan was taking off, alone, for his advertised stunting exhibition. There was a big crowd by then; people who had gotten up before daylight so they could get their chores done and arrive in time to see this wonder—to see a human being ride the air and do incredible things above them.

TALLERAND'S driver opened the pasture gate and came into the field, blowing his horn to attract attention and make a way through the crowd.

Trick Hoyt tried to estimate the number of people. Everybody in the county must be here. And they'd all vote for that man who sat in the rear seat of the touring car, smirking, bowing, as though for some reason he should be credited with the daring stunts of the airman.

Moore landed, and there were shouts and applause and good-natured bantering:

"Old Tallow's got himself an air buggy to ride to Springfield in."

"White did the loop-the-loop, Bert. Let's see you do it?"

Trick Hoyt saw a spasm of nervousness pass over Tallerand's face. He was afraid! After all his talk of courage, in his newspaper, he was afraid. If only . . .

He was standing up on the rear seat, now, giving a speech. It was the same old thing. He was a man of the people. He wasn't one of these college dudes. They all knew him. He'd have the courage to talk up to those smart alecks in Springfield.

Al Bibbs was helping him into the rear cockpit of the plane. Courage! Why, the man was in a blue funk. Trick's teeth clinched her lower lip till it hurt. If only Dan Moore . . .

The high notes of a trumpet broke into her thoughts. It was a band! Tom Dawson and other men came ahead of it, opening a way for the brilliantly uniformed musicians.

Al Bibbs was at her side. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed at the sacrilege. "It's our band. It's the Selma City Silver Trumpets!" A savage growl of disgust came from his throat. "Lookut that damn' Tom Dawson. Lookut that banner! 'A vote for Tallow is a vote for bravery.'"

Trick was laughing. She could hardly speak. "Read those other banners, Al: 'Vote for Iron Man Tallerand,' 'Tallerand, Brave as a Lion.' Don't you understand, Al?" Her fingers dug into his arm. "Look up there! Look at Dan up there."

The band had stopped. The rip of an airplane engine crescendoed. Faces were turned upward. A combined exclamation rose from the crowd. The airplane arched and twirled.

"A barrel-roll, Al. That was a barrel-roll! Tear it to pieces, Dan, you sweetheart!"

The crowd was silent, watching.

AL FELT a roll of bills thrust into his hand. The girl's voice was high with excitement. "This is asking a lot, Al. But please take this into town. Pay Dan's hotel bill and get his baggage. And do the same at my place. Tell Mrs. Maimer I'll write and explain everything. There's a hundred dollars there, Al. Take out what I owe you. And hurry, Al! Hurry back with that luggage."

The growl of Bibbs' Packard was drowned by another engine as the plane swept over them, doing ocean waves and banking up in a vertical turn, so that they could see the clear silhouette of the pilot's head and shoulders.

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"Where's old Tallow?" somebody shouted.

"Old Tallow's crawled into his hole. He's got his head down in his hands."

A carefully drilled chorus of voices joined in a shout, led by Tom Dawson: "*Vote for Tallow, the iron man.*"

Alcova and Selma people forgot their long-standing feud, joining together in backslapping and laughter at this glorious comedy. Farmers began to remember past grievances, shouting them as the plane stunted:

"That's for that old seeder you cheated me on, Tallow."

"Them turkey settin' eggs that never hatched. Remember them, you old horse-thief?"

The plane landed, but that didn't end the comedy.

Tom Dawson's friend, the news photographer, had his camera in position and Tom stood beside him with plate case and a smaller camera. The thing carried through with the precision of a well-rehearsed play.

Moore landed and turned and taxied back, placing the ship in good camera range. Dawson's friend worked with the cool, methodical speed of a veteran newspaper photographer.

"Bring the handbills," Moore shouted, cutting his ignition switch. "We forgot the handbills. Have to go up again to drop 'em."

Tallerand scrambled from the cockpit, bleating with terror. Moore followed him, and Dawson's friend followed the action with his camera.

Tallerand was like a frightened rabbit, trying to dodge through the crowd that kept shoving him from one to another and out into the open.

"Senator," Moore shouted, choking with laughter, "we forgot to drop the handbills. Don't tell me you're not goin' up again!"

"See the pictures in the Selma *Bugle*," Tom Dawson shouted, in newsboy chant. "Special edition tomorrow afternoon. Read all about Senator Tallerand's conquest of the air!"

CHAPTER XVIII

STORM WARNINGS

MOORE beckoned Trick Hoyt to lean forward in the rear cockpit seat, so she could hear his shouted words. Instead, she unclasped her safety belt and stood up. She seemed born without the slightest fear of altitude.

He slackened throttle and turned, meeting her smile with a grin. "Since you kidnapped me from Alcova, not even givin' me a chance to get a map, I think we better land at this next town, 'fore dark."

She looked down at the rolling country, two thousand feet below.

"Where will you land, Dan?"

"There by the wagon road. Always land near a road, Trick. And always circle the town a couple of times so the natives'll come out with transportation."

He demonstrated, circling low, working his throttle. He returned to the field he had pointed out and dragged across it twice, just a few feet above ground, studying the surface. Then he came in and landed.

He got out, stomping his feet over the moist sod. "Musta rained heavy here yesterday," he commented and started undoing their suitcases that he'd lashed to the inner-bay struts on each side of the fuselage. She got out to help him.

"We'll have to tie the wing tips down," he said, "an' dig the wheels in. How d'you like barnstorming, Trick?"

She tilted her nose, wrinkling it, sniffing the air. "Dan, I just started to really live, two hours ago, when we took off from Alcova. Dan, I think that eventually the citizens of Alcova and Selma will erect a statue to you for saving them from Tallerand."

He chuckled. "And you thought I was weak-minded enough to believe all his promises!"

"Don't start getting braggy. You *did* believe him for a while. Dan, look at that car coming!"

"Must be doing fifty miles an hour!" Moore exclaimed. "What—"

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BEFORE the car came to a full stop a woman had leaped from it. She was tall, gaunt and the gusty air blew the kitchen apron she was wearing up to blind her for a moment with its flapping width.

She didn't stop her ungainly run until she was close and facing Moore. Her words came between rasping, sobbing breaths. "God bless you! God bless you!" she panted. "They told me you'd refused to come, because of the weather; because of this rain that's threatening."

Moore exchanged glances with Trick Hoyt.

"The mine road was washed out. There was a cloudburst yesterday, up Slate creek. And the company doctor with his arm just broken!"

The man called from the road. "I'll go up an' get the gate open for them, Mrs. Regan."

Moore caught at the name. "Tell us what's happened, Mrs. Regan."

"The automobile road's washed out. They can't haul him out the creek road. The doctor said it'd kill Jake."

Trick was patting her back, talking in a low, quieting voice. "Who is Jake, Mrs. Regan?"

"My husband. Just as well yesterday as you or I, except for that little pain in his side. He took some cathartic pills. Jake was always a great hand for doctorin' himself."

"A burst appendix?" Dan hazarded.

She nodded, without words, sobbing into her opened, shielding hands.

Moore looked up at the darkening sky, at the rain clouds advancing from the west. He was frowning. "And you think I came here to fly him to a hospital?"

Her head snapped up. Her eyes were wide and wild, to match the dishevelment of her gray hair. "You're not Wheeler—aren't you Mr. Wheeler, from Springfield?" Her eyes begged him to answer yes.

He shook his head, slowly. "No, I'm not Mr. Wheeler."

The frantic hope died in the woman's face. Her strength seemed to slip from her, and Theresa Hoyt had to steady her quickly by the shoulders. Mrs. Regan said dully, "I thought— They said the pilot refused to come, but I hoped . . ."

The rain clouds were coming swiftly, dark and menacing. Dan Moore stared at the sky, his face taut, silent for several moments. "Pilot was right," he muttered at length. "Twenty to one a plane'd crack up in this. He was no fool."

Then he swung around with an abrupt, angry movement. "I'll fly your husband, Mrs. Regan," he said harshly. He had only a glimpse of the joy that transformed her, because Theresa Hoyt's little cry came quickly, and his eyes turned to her.

Her arms dropped from the old woman's shoulders. She advanced toward him slowly. "Dan, you're not going! You can't! This rain is getting worse. You'll be up there in pitch blackness. You won't be able to tell the ground from the sky."

His voice was embarrassed. He spoke lightly, hurriedly, to stop her protests. "What I need is some of Red's instruments. Eh, Trick? With those you won't have to see ground or sky. Just sit there and look at the instruments an' t'hell with what's goin' on outside the cockpit."

"Please, Dan!" She had her hands on his shoulders, clinging to him as though to restrain him by force. "You said the chances are only one in twenty. If you crashed in this kind of weather, without seeing a thing, even you—Dan, isn't there someone you owe your life to? Someone who loves you just as much as this woman loves her husband?"

His smile hardened. His head moved slowly from side to side. "Not any one, Trick," he said. He took her hands from his shoulders, gently. "Ease up, sweet. You're making a mountain of a molehill."

Her arms dropped, in a loose, hopeless gesture. "Yes," she said, as though to herself. "You're going to make the flight. I should have known you would."

He didn't seem to hear her.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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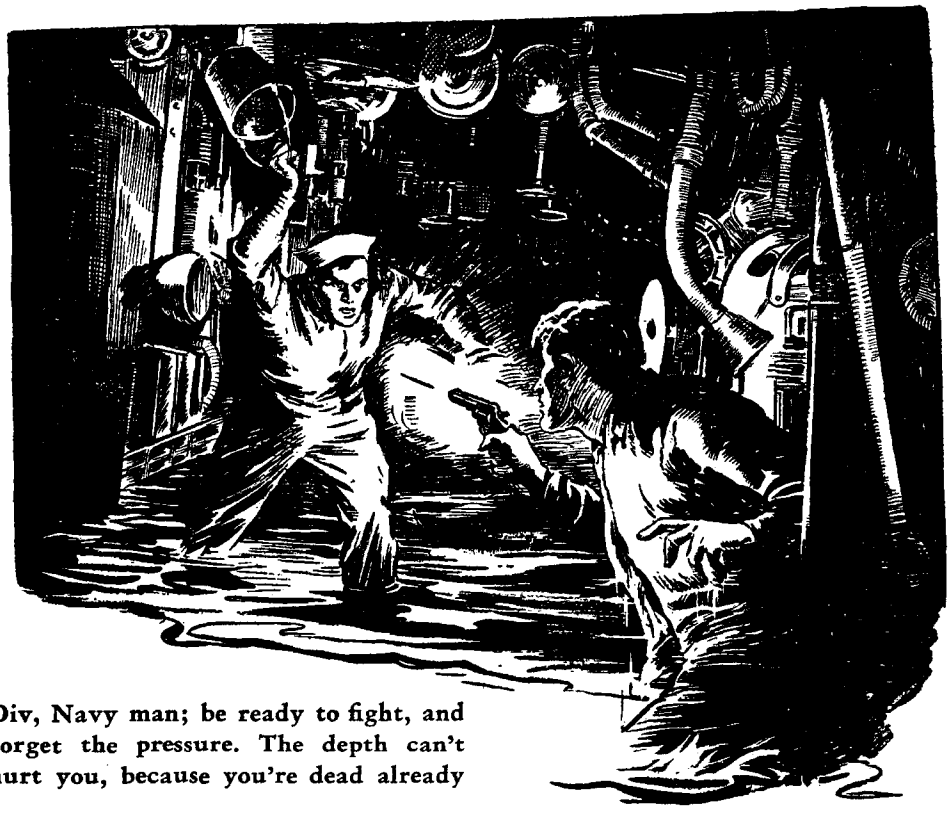
Deep Sea Dugan



Div, Navy man; be ready to fight, and forget the pressure. The depth can't hurt you, because you're dead already

By ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

Author of "The Captain Bites the Sea," "Down Went McGinty," etc.

A NEWSBOY passed the auto court just as the lumber truck was backing in to dump another load for the new group of cottages. The boy's loud yells were unintelligible; but the black, three-inch headlines leaped out at the driver:

CRASH SINKS U. S. SUB;
33 ABOARD FEARED LOST!

"Jeez!" muttered the leather-jacketed truck driver. He had been a destroyer man, himself. "Another damn pigboat!"

Twice, that morning, he had tooled the big truck within inches of Cabin 9 without mishap. This time clearance was impaired by a one-by-twelve that had jiggled sidewise on the load; and for a moment the driver was thinking of thirty-three men and a steel coffin under the sea.

He felt a slight jar, and stepped hard on his brake. But glass tinkled on the floor of Cabin 9 as the loose plank jammed into the window.

"Jeez!" the driver exclaimed more sharply. This was a new job, and he wanted to keep it. He looked anxiously around. Nobody had seen; traffic was roaring past on Anaheim Boulevard, and it was doubtful that anyone had heard.

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In Cabin 9, a radio played and the venetian blind was drawn against the sunlight. No one showed at the shattered window. The truck driver shifted gears and moved forward to get clearance.

*

The radio played on. Rox Reynolds and his Rhythm Rustlers, coming through the courtesy of Bright Monday Soap Chips. *We interrupt the musical program, ladies and gentlemen, to bring you an important news bulletin.*

Washington, D. C.—At least part of the thirty-three men who went to the bottom in the new submarine Alpheus *are still alive, the Navy Department announced this afternoon. Oscillator signals from the stricken sub have been picked up by the destroyer* Courtney, *first Navy vessel to reach the scene off the Southern California coast, officials revealed. The* Alpheus, *reportedly carrying new and revolutionary armament, was rammed just before daylight, in a thick fog, by the freighter* Mary Bradbury . . .

THE man sleeping in Cabin 9 stirred and flung a bare, muscular arm across his pillow. His bed was scarcely rumpled; he was lying as he had lain for hours, breathing stertorously, swiftly, sometimes moaning a little through purple lips. An open gas heater burned at the full in the tight little room; the air was hot and dry and dead.

Oxygen poured through the broken window just in time. A little wind was coming off the sea; it swayed the blind and flapped it against the shattered pane, and it touched the man's pale face with coolness.

He groaned and turned over; the movement sent daggers through his brain, *Boy, it must have been a lulu of a speed run! And I wasn't going to drink any more, after what liquor did to me.* The radio was too loud; why didn't somebody turn it down. Be a shipmate, Jack, and pipe the damn thing down.

His eyes fluttered open and the whiteness of the plastered wall was like a blow across them. There was a neat gray civilian suit draped across a chair. He didn't remember it. *Where am I?*

He rasped his tongue over dry lips and tried to tie things together, but they eluded him along the dim border of coma. There was Navy pay coming to him. Had to get it. After that, to hell with the outfit. Run away. Never saw this room before. . . .

What a head! Somebody pipe down that music. He pulled himself to a sitting position and thought his head would burst. Maybe it was the bends again, coming back on him after that dive.

And then he remembered that it had been weeks since he dived, weeks since he lost his nerve. After that, there had been the court-martial for bringing liquor aboard, and Lieutenant Mansward saying: "I never thought you were yellow. A man who has to drink before he can dive is yellow."

The radio music stopped. *This is the noon edition of News on Parade. America forgot the European war today while the spotlight of national interest turned anxiously, prayerfully, to a lonely stretch of the blue Pacific off the California coast. It was there that the Navy's newest submarine, the 530-ton* Alpheus, *sank with all hands this morning after . . .*

The man leaped from his bed, staring at the radio on the table. But pain came in regular pulsating spasms that blotted out the words of the broadcast and drove him to his knees. After a minute he was able to go to the sink for a glass of water, and then he splashed the cold water in his face and collapsed in the chair. He discovered he was naked.

The voice of the radio reporter gradually ceased to be a blurred rumble. It was down to the human-interest elements of the story: . . . *wives and sweethearts besieging Navy headquarters with tearful telephone calls. Benson, Drew and Mayberry all were newlyweds. One member of the* Alpheus' *crew, Michael Dugan, gunner's mate second class, crossed the continent to keep his rendezvous with death. Officers aboard the submarine tender* Verne *revealed that*

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Dugan reported aboard from Washington, D. C., only half an hour before the Alpheus *sailed. Rescue measures were . . .*

MIKE DUGAN, gunner's mate second, lifted his aching head and laughed without mirth. A good one on the radio people, reporting him aboard the *Alpheus* when he was here. And where was here? He stood up, clutching the table for support. Heat from the gas stove blasted his bare leg, and he stooped to turn out the burner. Bending thus, with the stove's fumes directly in his face, he nearly lost consciousness again.

Then he saw the penciled sheet on the table.

It didn't make sense. In a strange handwriting, it started off: "This is a suicide . . ."

Mike Dugan tottered to the sink and bathed his face again. He came back and read the entire note.

This is a suicide, so don't make any fuss about it. I have no relatives to make any. My name is William Porter, age thirty, New York City. I borrowed the car you will find outside, when the owner wasn't looking. I am a stranger in California. There's enough money in my pocket to pay for a funeral, and papers to identify me. Why I took this way out is my own business.

Dugan looked around him, half expecting to see the body of William Porter somewhere in the room. But he was alone. He saw a rumpled white handkerchief by the bed; when he picked it up there was a stir of a sweet, sickish odor. This sent a little wave of nausea through Dugan, and he remembered some things.

He had been late, the evening before, because of an unauthorized stopover on the way across country. He had hurried to the harbor in a taxi; the driver pointed down a long, little-used pier, and said: "The *Alpheus* is down there. Navy's being mighty foxy about something on her."

Dugan had taken his seabag on his shoulder and started walking. Somebody had leaped from the shadows, then, to clip him behind the ear—it was sore there, yet. And there was that sickish smell, choking him. Chloroform.

It didn't make sense. Dugan went through the gray suit until he found a billfold. It contained more than ninety dollars, and a standard identification card. *William Porter, 30, five-eleven, weight 166, brown hair, blue eyes. In case of accident notify—* And the space was blank.

Mike Dugan was twenty-nine, and the description might have been his own. He sat down to puzzle over this while the wind off the sea cooled his face. Somebody —William Porter, he supposed—had tried to asphyxiate him. Tried to murder him. And left ninety dollars in the suit.

It didn't make sense.

"*He* must have my blues," Dugan muttered. "And my orders. He—" A thought struck him with vivid, forceful clarity. He said slowly: "Holy, jumping Moses!" and began to dress.

BECAUSE of the stolen car, he wished neither to ask questions nor to be interrogated at the tourist camp. He walked for several blocks, remembering that he answered the description of an auto thief and a man who was either a would-be suicide or an attempted murderer. Then he caught a bus for Long Beach.

Downtown, he went to a park bench where he could sit in the sun and think things out. He had a good suit of civilian clothes, and ninety dollars—more than was coming to him in Navy pay. If the *Alpheus* stayed on the bottom, nobody would ever know that Mike Dugan wasn't there. Nobody would ever look for him as a deserter.

He thought of a sweating, curved steel overhead and the ghastly white faces of men who waited and waited while the water dripped and gurgled and sloshed underfoot. He thought of the pressure building up down there, squeezing a man until his eardrums ached and his eyes felt as if they were popping out, squeezing nitrogen

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bubbles into his blood and bone and tissue.

A shudder shook Mike Dugan. He knew what pressure was, what he had escaped because a stranger leaped upon him just as he was about to report aboard the *Alpheus*.

Dugan had been a first-class gunner's mate and in line for appointment to warrant gunner's rank, when he was sent to the diving school at Washington. In a practice dive in the Atlantic, his life line and air hose had fouled: he had stayed on the bottom too long, and then come up too quickly.

He remembered the torture of the bends, and how the very thought of the next dive drove him to drink. He brought liquor aboard and was caught. The court-martial busted him to second class, and he could kiss his chance of wearing gold goodbye.

What hurt worst was Bill Mansward's saying he was yellow. Mansward had been the skipper, a square, two-fisted guy. Well, he was transferred—shanghaied to Asiatic duty—before the court martial convened.

Nobody on the court seemed to understand what pressure could do to a man. Well, Dugan was through with the Navy. . . .

"Extra! Extra! Read all about it. Read all about that submarine!"

He came back to the present. "Here, son!"

He took the paper, holding in his excitement.

It was all over the front page. Three men lost—they were on the bridge at the time of the collision—and thirty waiting death or rescue in the helpless steel hulk. She lay two hundred and twenty feet down. Nobody had ever made an escape from that depth with the individual safety lungs, the paper said, and Navy authorities hoped the trapped men could hold out until the salvage tug reached the scene with its big diving bell.

There was a picture of the *Alpheus*, and below it a two-column box of bold type, listing the names of officers and men. Dugan looked for his own name and found it. And then his eyes jerked back toward the top of the list . . .

LIEUT. WILLIAM G. MANSWARD,
Executive Officer

The man who was through with the Navy caught his breath. Bill Mansward. The skipper. So he hadn't gone to the China Station, after all; he was down there with the rest of them, in a steel tomb. And the Pacific rolled its shifting tons of relentless pressure over it.

IT WAS a difficult matter to see the admiral on the *Verne*. He was a little, gray man who had aged ten years since morning and would age another ten before the salvage tug anchored over the spot where the *Alpheus* lay.

The *Verne* was preparing to get under way. She had newspapermen and cameramen aboard; there were reports to Eleventh Naval District and Washington; there were a thousand and one details, and all the weight of them lay on the little gray man's shoulders.

He heard part of Mike Dugan's startling story, and sat more erect in his chair. "Sit down, Dugan," he said, and called an aide. "See if the personnel office has received a service record for Michael Dugan, gunner's mate second class, ordered to the *Alpheus*. Check the fingerprints on that record with those of this man."

He busied himself with papers, then, and made a telephone call while the *Verne* still had a telephone connection running to the dock. The officer returned and took Dugan's index fingerprint.

"They match, sir," he said.

"Very well. Please close the door; I want to talk to Dugan alone. Now, Dugan—What reason can *you* see for such a strange attack on you? To take your place in a new crew, aboard a submarine, a man would have to know his way around. You say you know the executive officer, Mansward. Then he'd know you."

Dugan nodded. "Yes sir. But Michael isn't an uncommon name in the Navy. There's my service record: it didn't arrive in time to be sent aboard the *Alpheus*. The man using my name could get away with

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it for a time. Say until the *Alpheus* reached San Francisco. I think Porter intended to leave the ship there. And take something with him, sir. I don't know what, but *something*. The papers have been full of hints that she carried—"

"She carried an armor-piercing device that is attached to the warheads of her torpedoes, Dugan," the admiral said gravely. "This device is small. Not unlike a spearhead, graduating up to a three-inch base, and containing a new type of explosive."

Dugan stared. "But a submarine doesn't carry warheads in peace time, sir."

"The *Alpheus* did. She was to test them at Mare Island." The admiral reached for his telephone and called a number. "This is Admiral Wilton. See if you have a card in your file under the name of William Porter. You'll have to report to me later by radio. We're getting under way."

Then, to Mike Dugan: "Your record shows you were reduced in rating and dismissed from the diving school."

"Yes, sir," the sailor answered, flushing. "The pressure got me, sir. Bends. And I made a mistake; I drank, and—"

"You should have reported aboard the *Alpheus* five days ago, Dugan. What was the delay?"

"I stopped over, sir. I—I was about to go over the hill, sir, thinking that I was all washed up with the Navy. But not now." His chin came up; he met the eyes of the little gray man levelly. "Could I dive, sir?"

THE pressure. It began as the deck crew bolted down his helmet and he valved the first compressed air into the rubber suit. Somebody tapped the top of his helmet with a wrench, and he knew he was ready. He lifted his weighted feet, stepped on the diving stage, and grasped its bails.

One other diver had already been down, had reported that the submarine lay with a list to starboard. He had cleared the antennae away from the escape hatch; there was a tangle of wreckage here, and the job took time. They had hoisted this man in, and now it was up to Mike Dugan to secure the shackle end of the big rescue chamber's downhaul cable.

The water broke over his feet, crept around his legs in a chill circle. His face port went awash, and he valved a little more air into the suit; he could hear the roar of the incoming air, and the gurgle of the exhaust valve, fluttering at the back of his helmet.

"All right, Dugan?" asked the deck in his helmet phone.

Dugan wasn't all right. His throat was dry and constricted with the fear that caught at his heart. The pressure. His ears were blocked; he swallowed hard and cleared them, and he freed his tongue from the dry roof of his mouth.

"All right," he said.

He stepped off the stage into a translucent green nothingness, and felt himself dragged sidewise through the water. The descending line struck his hand; he grasped it and crooked a leg around it.

He told them to lower away.

It was a long way down. Two hundred and twenty feet. Too much air in your suit, and you blew yourself out of the water and got the bends from too rapid an ascent. Too little air, and the sea began squeezing you; the pressure hugged your legs tightly and worked upward like the coils of a boa constrictor. Until your ribs cracked, or the pressure forced a man's body right up into the small space of the copper helmet.

Mike Dugan tried not to think of these things, but they roared through his mind with the rush of air, they babbled at him insanely with the gurgling of his exhaust valve. The green light dimmed and darkened. He had to breathe more rapidly; he had to swallow constantly. And nothing could allay the old, recurrent fear.

THEN he remembered the man who called himself William Porter. The man who had wanted so desperately to get aboard the *Alpheus* that he had attacked Mike Dugan, taken his clothes, set the stage for a murder that would look like suicide.

That man was down here; Dugan

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wanted to face him. Dugan wanted to see him before the rescue chamber brought him up.

His feet struck the deck of the submarine.

"On deck!" he reported, and his own voice sounded queer and faint and distorted under the pressure. "I'm on the submarine."

The voice in his phone said: "You're forward of the conning tower. Find the gun, and you'll know where you are."

Dugan swallowed again, and drove himself forward. He was more afraid than he had been that time when his lines fouled, but he used his fear as a lash; he whipped his very soul with that fear and his contempt of himself, driving himself on.

There was the three-inch gun. It had been struck a glancing blow by the freighter's bow. It was twisted on its mount. Dugan worked past it.

Too much air in his suit: a surge of the current lifted him from the deck, and he valved out pressure with a frantic thrust of his chin against the spit valve. His weighted shoes slammed the deck again. If he slipped and dropped to the mud, there would be a squeeze.

Somebody was hammering the hull under his feet. Bill Mansward, maybe. Trying to lead him to the escape hatch. He found it, and reported his position in the phone. He was instructed to haul in on the light line looped around his arm; the downhaul cable was being lowered.

This gave him something to do, and he forgot his fears. He pulled in what seemed an interminable length, and finally felt the shackle of the half-inch steel cable.

"Hold the slack!"

They had taught him at diving school how to secure this shackle to the spindle of the hatch. He could do the job blindfolded. It took only a few minutes: it seemed like hours. His head was light, his knees weak. The pressure.

"All secure!" he reported.

There came four jerks on his lifeline; he answered with four. He caught the descending line again, and was hauled upward. The stage was waiting at about a hundred and fifty feet. Dugan grasped the bails and yelled that he was on it. He began taking exercise to reduce the pressure in his body.

"I want to come on up; I got to come on up!" he said.

"Take it easy, Dugan. You want the bends?"

"How long will it be before the chamber goes down?"

"They're gettin' it ready now."

The stage moved up twenty feet or so, and stopped there. Mike Dugan chafed at the delay. He wasn't afraid any longer; he just wanted to get down to the *Alpheus,* to get inside her. . . .

HE HADN'T been down nearly so long as it seemed; and so the stages of decompression were passed through quickly. When the bulk of the salvage tug's hull showed through the lightening water, he was relieved to see the dark blob of the rescue chamber still there, alongside.

And then the stage came out of the water, and the diving suit suddenly became an unbearable weight on his shoulders.

The dressers unbolted his helmet and stripped the suit from him. Dugan said. "I've got to see the admiral."

"How'd you like to see the President, too, Dugan?" kidded one of the "bears," but Dugan looked up and the little gray man was coming out on deck.

"I'd like permission to go down on the first trip, sir," Dugan said. "I'd like to report aboard and remain there until the last trip up."

The admiral hesitated. "If something should go wrong with the operation of the rescue chamber, you'd be down there—in the same fix as those thirty men."

"It's important, sir!" Dugan lowered his voice. "*He'll* be waiting until the last trip. No telling what he'll try to pull on them."

"Permission granted, Dugan."

He clambered down through the upper hatch of the eighteen-thousand-pound steel drum, and took a seat. The hatch was closed on the daylight; one of the two

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operators dogged it tight, and the little air motor began to whirr.

The chamber had positive buoyancy, but the air motor wound the downhaul cable on the reel and pulled them down through the sea slowly and steadily.

There was no pressure in here; it was all on the outside of this steel drum. Mike Dugan felt strange. This was like being in a sunken submarine, itself. This was an incredible development in man's battle against the ocean depths.

A fading light came in through the three eyeports. The air motor looked and sounded a little like that used to operate a pneumatic drill, and there was an array of gauges and valves.

They struck the hull of the *Alpheus* with a thump. The operators turned valves and water rumbled into the ballast tank until the chamber lost its buoyancy and settled on the deck. Then compressed air blew the water out of the chamber's lower compartment.

Now the pressure of the sea—the same pressure Mike Dugan had felt all around him a short time before—bore down on the top and sides of the chamber and sealed its rubber gasket tightly over the submarine's hatch.

One of the operators opened the hatch that led to the chamber's lower compartment. He descended and began securing the holding down rods.

"Here's where you get off, bud," he said to Dugan. "What for, I don't know. Are you nuts?"

Dugan drew a long breath. "I've got to report aboard the *Alpheus*," he said. "Before anybody comes up, I've got to report aboard."

The rescue hatch of the *Alpheus* was opened, with the steel chamber over it like an inverted tumbler.

They had been under pressure, down here in the torpedo room of the sunken sub; the water had been leaking in, forcing the air against the overhead like the bubble in a carpenter's level. The air came up into the rescue chamber in a hot, fetid rush.

White faces turned eagerly upward; they looked like pale, unlovely flowers in an electrically lighted sunken garden.

There was a shout, almost hysterical in its relief. And then an officer's voice:

"All right. Bear a hand here with Mr. Mansward. He goes first, and then the first seven of you, alphabetically. Anderson—Argyle — Benson — Brown — Cimini — Drew—Dugan—"

DUGAN! The real Dugan went scrambling down the hatch. "Just a minute, sir! Just a minute!" He reached the deck of the torpedo room, while men stared. There was Bill Mansward on a bunk, his eyes closed, his head bandaged. He wouldn't be able to identify Mike Dugan. Dugan saluted as if he were crossing the gangway. "Reporting aboard, sir," he said. "Admiral's orders. I am to stay down until the last trip."

The officer stared, too, but there was no time for questions. They hoisted Mansward's limp form up through the hatch. He took up more room than a man able to sit down.

"We can only take six, this way," the operator reported.

"Dugan and Drew remain until the next trip," the officer said.

Mike Dugan's eyes roved over the faces of the men left in the torpedo room. He saw nothing: that eager, strained look was worn by every man alike. And there were several who would answer the general description as to size and coloring.

The hatch clanged shut. They heard the holding down rods being cleared, and the rumbling sound of ballast dumped to compensate for the weight of the six passengers. Then the rescue chamber grated on the hull as the seal was cracked.

The men under the sea were alone once more.

Water sloshed underfoot. It was knee deep; the pressure seemed to grow immediately, and the air was hot to a man's face. The officer looked at Dugan and said: "What the hell was the reason for your coming down?"

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"Admiral's orders, sir," Dugan said doggedly. "Maybe"—he lied—"maybe he thought you needed help."

"Help can only come from the outside," the officer grunted. He opened the jet on an oxygen flask and coolness spurted into the hot air. He closed the jet again, quickly. The oxygen was precious.

There was a thump and lift and banging somewhere aft. The current was growing stronger. Mike Dugan wondered how rough it would have to be, up on the surface, before the rescue chamber would have to cease operations.

He wanted to ask: "Who's Dugan?" but he didn't. His eyes strayed to the torpedoes in their racks. At the nose of each was the tiny armor-piercing device; it looked, as the admiral had said, like a spear head, conical and deadly. It was designed to explode upon contact, tearing a hole that would allow the torpedo itself to penetrate more deeply into the vitals of the ship with its heavier charge.

One of those spearheads could be unscrewed and concealed under a man's peacoat. Maybe under his jumper. Desperate enough, a spy might attempt to take one up with him if he had the chance. And the man who called himself William Porter was desperate enough to attempt murder.

THE water was rising. Dugan could hear a trickling sound somewhere aft; he guessed that the water was coming in around the cables that ran along the overhead and penetrated the supposedly watertight bulkheads. The lights dimmed and then came back on brightly.

"Water's getting to that forward battery," a sailor commented. His voice was tired, disinterested.

Men sat around or lay on the bunks. There was only the clatter, aft, and the occasional hiss of the fresh, life-giving oxygen. There was one man with a racking cough; and the others breathed heavily, shallowly. Mike Dugan tried to plan his next step, and found he could only wait. They would call Dugan's name, next time.

Then the lights went out.

"Steady, men!" The officer's authoritative voice broke into the chorus of cries. "Darkness makes no difference. If you smell any chlorine, that's something else. Keep your Momsen lungs handy to use as gas masks."

It was taking the rescue chamber hours, days, weeks. Mike Dugan sat on a bunk and marveled that he felt no fear. He felt only a cold, grim anger. He said: "What happened to Mr. Mansward?"

"Got knocked down in the control room when we were hit," said the sailor next to him. "Banged his head. He hasn't been conscious since then—and I guess he's lucky. Lord, I wish I had a cigarette!"

Somebody laughed shrilly. "I wish I had a million dollars and a yacht. And a blonde!"

There was weak laughter.

They waited again. The man coughed somewhere in the darkness. The air was hot and dead: it reminded Mike Dugan of that room where he had awakened so long ago. It must be night up on the surface, now. . . .

The rescue chamber thumped against the deck.

"All right," said the officer when it had been secured and the hatch was open. He swung his flashlight around. "Drew—Dugan — Evans — Foster — Freeman — Garrett — Gebhardt — Giles. Up you go!"

Men sloshed forward through the water. Mike Dugan drew a long breath and held it. Now he'd have to call on the officer to halt the man who posed as Dugan. Now—

"I'd like to wait, sir," a voice said. It was a crisp, hard voice. "Let Smith take my place. He's got a bad cough."

Mike Dugan strained his eyes, but the officer was saving that precious flashlight. He said: "All right, Dugan. That means you go last. Come on, Smith!"

The cough sounded hollowly in the rescue chamber. There was a faint glow from the lights up in the passenger compartment of the chamber, and the shadows of the climbing men against it. Once more the hatch was closed.

Seventeen men left. The rescue chamber

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hoisted eight more to safety on its next trip. There was another eternity of waiting in the darkness, and then it came again. Five men went this time.

Three on the bottom. The officer, Mike Dugan, and the man who had tried to kill him.

Out of the blackness, the officer said: "Well, it won't be long now. What's your name? I mean you—the man who was sent down?"

"Michael," said Mike Dugan.

"Well, Michael, you've had a little taste of it. But *you* knew that you'd be taken out. It wasn't very pleasant before that, was it, Dugan? Through those fifteen or sixteen hours when we didn't know."

"It certainly wasn't, sir," agreed the hard voice. "The worst of it was keeping still. It makes a man restless."

Mike Dugan heard the water sloshing. The man who had tried to kill him was moving about. Restless again.

Dugan dropped his legs over the side of the bunk and felt the cold water close over them. He listened carefully. The man was wading forward. Where the torpedoes were racked.

THIS is it! Dugan thought. *It's time to move in on him!* His heart thumped against his ribs; he was suddenly short of breath, and the pressure had grown with his excitement. . . .

Porter said: "There'll be plenty of room next trip, sir. Could I carry up some of my personal effects? My ditty bag, sir?"

"All right," said the officer. "You're lucky to have anything left."

The water made too much noise. Dugan climbed on a lower bunk and crawled over the mattresses from one bunk to the next, listening to Porter's splashing in the water and the rummaging sound he was making.

It would be easy enough to jump Porter after they were safe topside; but then the seizure would become a cold, official arrest, out of Mike Dugan's hands. He wanted to get those hands on Porter; his cold rage was turning hot, now, as he neared his quarry.

He came to the last bunk. The torpedoes were beyond. The rescue chamber bumped overhead, and there was a lot of noise as it settled into place.

Above this thumping, Mike Dugan thought he could detect the metallic sound of threads being unscrewed. He stepped into the water again, and leaped.

His shoulder caught the other man's middle, knocking a grunt out of him. There was a splash as Porter threshed backward, and a cry of surprise burst from his lips.

"What's the idea? What—"

"You damned spy!" Dugan roared. "You damned murdering spy!"

The flashlight swung their way, and the officer was coming on the jump, yelling for order.

The light gave Mike Dugan a target. He lashed out with a hard-knuckled fist, and Porter slammed against the torpedo tubes. He sat down in the water, a trickle of blood on his lips, his face ghastly white. The officer grabbed Dugan's shoulder from behind.

"What's going on here, Michael?" he demanded. "What's this—"

Dugan caught the whip of blue steel glinting in Porter's hand. He yelled a warning and whirled to shove the officer out of the way. There was a flat, coughing sound; the bullet glanced from a torpedo's round side and splashed into the water. Dugan leaped forward and stepped into a bucket that was submerged.

The gun spat again as he fell, and Porter was on his feet, threshing toward him through the water.

"Kill you both!" he snarled. "You got in a fight and bumped each other off—see? They'll have to take my word for it. They—"

Dugan came up out of a crouch, the heavy bucket in his hand. There was no light; the flash had dropped from the officer's hand. The gun split the blackness with a streak and a cough; Dugan felt the bullet whip past his cheek.

He sloshed the contents of the bucket squarely above the gun flame, and then swung the bucket by the bail. It struck the

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gun with a clang, and Porter let out a howl as the blow smashed his fingers.

The next instant Dugan was on him, bearing him down, forcing his head under water. He banged the head on the steel deck.

The officer pulled him off just as the dim light of the rescue chamber showed through the open hatch.

"Michael!" yelled the officer. "Let him up! I've got the gun. What's this all about?"

Dugan lifted Porter's head above water. "Tell you—topside!" he panted. "But look here—sir!"

He pointed. One of the spearheads had been unscrewed almost to the point of removal.

IT WAS fully dark topside, and searchlights were playing on a restless sea. Mike Dugan emerged from the hatch of the rescue chamber and hoisted out the man he had gone down for; the admiral was on deck to see them helped aboard.

And Lieutenant Bill Mansword was able to sit in a chair with a blanket around his shoulders while he drank coffee.

"Dugan!" Mansward exclaimed. "Where did *you* come from? We had one Dugan—"

"You had a spy, sir!" Dugan said. "Ask the admiral, sir. I caught him trying to get away with one of those new warheads."

He dropped Porter on the deck. The little gray man nodded gravely.

"I received a radio from Intelligence, Dugan," he said. "They found that the Department of Justice had a card on one William Porter. No fingerprints. Nothing but the name and a general description—and the suspicion that he was working for a nation that's none too friendly toward America, just now.

"Apparently he hoped you'd be buried as a routine suicide case, and the authorities wouldn't connect the name to his card until too late to establish positive identification. Then—Well, he'd stand a chance of being declared dead, and the hunt for him would be dropped."

Mansward didn't understand all this. He said, bewilderedly: "But Dugan—you were East. You got in a jam—"

"He was busted one rating," the admiral said. "But I shouldn't wonder if it would be restored, after this."

Mike Dugan grinned. The pressure was gone.

THUNDER HOOFS

The Civil War was over, but its bitter memories were not dead. Dan Shea carried one deep within him when he came to that brave new world of the West; and the savage thing the war had started had to be finished before he could take his place among the pioneers. A magnificent novel of the West by
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COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—DECEMBER 28

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The Little Doll Died

Down the aisle that dripping figure advanced, until it came right up with the newlyweds

By THEODORE ROSCOE

"I DID SEE one dead man brought back to life, at that." It was a startling enough thing to say, yet not half so strange as the story GLENNON had to tell me later.

We had met on a boat bound for Haiti; and as we neared our destination the talk turned to zombies—those soulless corpses which the natives believe have been raised from the grave by witchcraft, and go about as slaves to evil masters.

Glennon, now in the life insurance business, said that he had led a detachment of Marines in Haiti from '19 to '34. About zombies he expressed skepticism; yet he admitted—well, that thing about a man raised from the dead. And right on the heels of that he said, "Are you interested in taxidermy?"

Before I could answer, he opened a shoebox he had been carrying around with him, and showed me a little doll: seemingly a crude home-made specimen, the leather worn, the stomach spilling sawdust, the face resembling an old tobacco-juice-stained baseball.

And after that he plunged into his story . . .

IT BEGAN (Glennon told me) in a jungle outpost called Morne Noir, where I had been sent with a detachment of Marines to look for CHARLEMAGNE PERRAULT—an edu-

This two-part serial began in last week's Argosy.

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cated Haitian who was leading a bloody revolt.

I built a stockade, tried to drill some miserable Haitian soldiers, then bogged down in the rainy season and sat down to wait. And in the midst of all this, civilization arrived, in the persons of WILFRED PEABODY, an absent-minded little scientist; his wife JENNY LOUISE, a hare-brained frilly blonde; and TERRENCE MCCOY, a charming, handsome Irishman and a past master of taxidermy.

In short order everybody in the place (except, apparently, Peabody) knew that Jenny Louise was crazy about McCoy; she fussed over him constantly, and paid practically no attention to her husband. McCoy for his part resisted her, gently and gallantly, pointing out what a swell guy Peabody was and recalling their long friendship dating from college days.

As for Peabody, he was much too busy on his big quest—trying to find a miniature Arawak mummy. The Arawaks, he explained, were a practically extinct tribe of aborigines who lived on the island when Columbus discovered Haiti. They had a secret for shrinking and curing the human body; and their midget-sized mummies were the rarest of all anthropological specimens.

THINGS were like that when word came to the village that Caco bandits under Charlemagne Perrault were going to attack the place with zombies. The population was terrified: half of them left town at once, and two-thirds of the loyal Haitians in the outpost had deserted by noon. To make things worse, Peabody had disappeared.

He came back at sundown, practically hysterical with excitement, bearing a miniature mummy that he had found in a mountain cave. . . . I didn't like it; I ordered them all to stay in the stockade from then on. That brought on a terrific scene between Peabody, who said he just *couldn't* give up his specimen-hunting, and Jenny Lou, who weepingly accused him of having no consideration for her.

It startled Peabody. He thought he'd been a good husband; he told Jenny Lou that he had saved twenty thousand dollars for her besides ten thousand in insurance, and had planned to surprise her when he retired.

The next morning he was gone again. It was raining, and the war drums had been beating. Jenny Lou surprised me by screaming for McCoy to go out and find her husband; and McCoy, gallant Irishman that he was, prepared to go at once. At the last minute she threw her white rain cape over his shoulders, begging him to be careful and keep dry.

I couldn't let him go alone; so we took horses and guns and plowed through the mud after Peabody. At length we found his notebook, in a wild valley where the path forked in two detours around the valley rim. At McCoy's insistence we split forces; but when I heard shots I rushed back to the trail he had taken. It led along the edge of a cliff where a goat wouldn't have wanted to walk.

AT the fourth turn I found McCoy, behind his dead horse in a welter of blood, mud, and rain. He'd been shot; was writhing in pain and cursing the natives. Just around the next bend was Peabody's little donkey, dead in the path, one hind leg sticking out over the cliff-edge.

McCoy sobbed: "I was just overtakin' him and he turned in his saddle . . . Them black scuts popped up in the bushes and let him have it."

Just before we started back I bent down and picked Peabody's little mummy out of the mud. It had been shot, too. And when we returned, Jenny Lou insisted on keeping it. She said, "I'll wait for him. He may come back. If Wilfred were to come back as a zombie . . ."

And she wouldn't budge. McCoy said, "There's only one thing to do: drag the lake at the bottom of that cliff." We did that —but we didn't find Peabody. Jenny Lou seemed satisfied: "So the Cacos did get his body. They've got to turn him into a zombie."

We argued. We pleaded. She *must* get out of Haiti. But when she answered, her voice was quiet as hardening cement:

"I'm going to stay.". . .

CHAPTER VI

ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES!

LISTEN! If she'd been unbudgeable before, you couldn't have moved her now with a team of horses. With Peabody missing from that lake, she was more than ever certain that the Cacos had snatched his body for their magical ghoulery.

Do you know what she did? She set to cleaning her husbands' clothes and polishing his equipment to have everything ready for him in case he returned. She was specially regardful of that evil little Arawak

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mummy: had it set up on his work table with his microscope and other scientific gadgets, like some hideous kind of toy to lure him home.

It made me ill to see her housecleaning around that tent. Dead and gone, the little man was getting twice the wifely attention he'd had when he was on hand. Remorse on the woman's part, I suppose, not uncommon with widows.

But most widows don't expect their husbands back. You'd have thought poor Peabody had just gone away for the weekend.

The Haitian villagers had been steamed up before, and now they really got into the spirit of the thing. Those Negroes went around with eyes like saucers full of milk. Charms, amulets and voodoo rattles were selling in Morne Noir at holiday prices. Dead goats began to appear in trees, hung up as protection against evil haunts, and there was a rush on the *ouanga* market with top prices for anti-zombie powder.

Don't laugh, mister. If half of civilized New Jersey could lose its head over a mythical invasion from Mars, think of that jungle-blockaded village in the middle of uncivilized Haiti!

The place took on the atmosphere of a spirit medium's parlor, and I was fit to be tied. What with Jenny Lou's antics and the Negroes worked up to fever pitch, we began to see walking corpses in every night-shadow.

Yes, we Marines have nervous systems, too. My men went out to mount guard after dark with their teeth rattling. I could feel my own thin veneer of civilization peeling away. All I had to do was blow out the candle and listen to those Caco drums thumping off in the *mornes* for a while, and I could glance up and see Peabody standing there in the moonlight, dead as a turnip, his yellow hair down over his eyes, red bullet-holes in his chest, making passes at me with his ghoulish, scientific hands.

And if I had the gollywoggles, imagine McCoy! Well, that Irish taxidermist was in bad shape, I could see that. He was losing more weight than any of us in this struggle with Mr. and Mrs. Peabody.

Figure his feelings about Jenny Lou. After all the coy glances she'd given him. All the romantic sighs. Now it was all right to go around and commiserate her husband's loss; that's all right for a couple of weeks. But a widow should begin to get over it, especially a young, good-looking widow who needs a strong friend around to look after her. More especially when she's previously given that strong friend reason to think she might want looking after.

Then try to guess McCoy's bafflement when he found Jenny Lou galvanized into that granite statue. You can see how that zombie angle must've frazzled his nerves.

I'd hear them arguing in the tent—or rather, McCoy arguing.

"You can't go on like this, Jenny Lou. Wilfred's dead. I saw those Cacos shoot him. He had that mummy under his coat; you see those bullet-holes in the thing. They—they must've hit him in the heart. He—he must've died instantly, Jenny Lou."

"Poor, poor Wilfred."

"Sure, Jenny, I know. It's all of us loved Wilfred. I couldn't feel worse over me own brother. But it's you that's alive! it's you that wants takin' care of now. Let me take you out of this hell-hole, Jenny. Now poor Wilfred's gone—"

"They found his body in that cold lake, Terry! The Cacos! The witch doctors! If he should ever come back—"

"No, Jenny! The dead stay dead!"

"But until I've seen him have a Christian burial—"

LORDY! I suppose I should've packed the woman off; detailed an escort of Marines along with McCoy and ordered her to the coast. But you can't tie up a white woman with rope and drag her.

Besides, I didn't have any real authority. My job was to operate a Marine outpost, and Mrs. Peabody was an American citizen in a foreign country in a state of war, and it was a damned dangerous trip

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to the coast. Charlemagne's raiders were reported watching the trails for just such a break.

I dispatched a messenger to the district commander at Cape Haiti—the colonel who'd wished the Peabody expedition on me in the first place. No answer. Weeks later the dispatch bearer's skeleton was found in the jungle. Meantime the colonel had dispatched me an order that crossed my message. Reinforcements were needed elsewhere. I was to stick in Morne Noir and hang on.

So I hung on. Jenny Louise hung on. McCoy hung on. We all hung on. Mentally we were hanging by some pretty thin threads as those weeks dragged by. There's some gray in my hair, brother, and that situation put it there. And why McCoy's didn't turn white as snow, I don't know. Certainly he had it tougher than the rest of us. Peabody had been his best friend, and the widow's attitude must've just about driven him batty. I'm here to tell you that handsome Irishman could take it!

He set to work on Jenny Louise with a new tack. Fresh wild-flowers in her tent every morning. Little nicknacks of special food. Ignored all talk of her husband. Went back to his taxidermy under the palm tree, always forcing a cheerful grin when Jenny Lou appeared, always whistling, singing or humming.

It was a good show he put on for that widow. A darn good show. It must've nearly killed him, for he had all an Irishman's superstition and moodiness locked up inside him, as well as pride. He was as patient with that woman as a doctor at a bedside. Thoughtful every minute of the time.

But that didn't work, either. When he brought her flowers she'd sigh because she'd once ignored the flowers her husband had brought her. His taxidermy reminded her of the old days when Wilfred was around.

"Oh, Terry, if I'd only treated him better. If Wilfred ever comes back—"

"Jenny, you've got to get that out of your mind right now. Wilfred's dead."

"But until I've seen him have a Christian burial—"

That phrase ran through those dark weeks at Morne Noir like a rune. A rune timed to the drums that beat at night. Tuned to the fact that Charlemagne had promised to turn all dead captives into zombies; that Peabody's little body had never been found; that Haiti is a land of hot jungle and moonlit mystery; that there are things in this world no white man understands.

Do you wonder the Marines contracted the shakes? That McCoy looked gaunt and tired and tight-strung as an overworked Irish fiddle? That all of Morne Noir talked about nothing but the Great White Doctor's second coming? Well, that state of affairs went on for twenty-four weeks. Six months!

It had to end, brother, take my honorable word. Either the Cacos were going to wipe us out, or we were all going stark nuts, or Morne Noir would blow sky high out of plain spontaneous combustion. From the home of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, a Marine outpost never saw the equal of that situation!

So I wasn't suprised when McCoy disappeared. Like Peabody, early one morning without saying goodbye. Over the fence and out.

HE DIDN'T leave any tracks. When the top sergeant first noticed his absence and we set out to look for him, we didn't know where to start. After forty hours' search, I summoned in the scouts and gave him up as a goner.

The Irishman's vanishing dealt me an extra sweat-bath. His pumpgun and knapsack had vanished along with him, and it looked as if he'd pulled foot; but there was always a chance he'd been kidnaped. Those Caco devils were experts at that sort of business. They could sneak into a camp and steal the suspenders off a sentry without his knowing it till he discovered his pants were down. I didn't like McCoy disappearing in such a manner. Worst of

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all, it left the Widow Peabody on my hands.

I'm afraid I lost my temper with the lady at this turn of events. I asked her into headquarters to tell her the word on McCoy, and I felt I knew her well enough by that time to give her a piece of my mind.

"Mrs. Peabody," I said, "I'm a soldier, not a judge conducting a court of domestic relations. However, I can't help making some fatherly remarks. With full sympathy for your status as a widow, I think you've treated your friend, Terry McCoy, like the devil. Your infernal nonsense about zombies has driven your last friend over the wall. Maybe he's been kidnaped by Cacos, but I'm inclined to think he couldn't stand this any more, and he's pulled out. In either case, he's liable to be killed."

Yes, and I said that with gestures. I was in the Marine Corps, not the Diplomatic Corps. Can you guess how that woman answered me? At news that McCoy had gone, she didn't bat an eye.

She said calmly:

"Don't worry about Terrence. He's so strong and confident; he could always take care of himself. Not like poor little Wilfred who really needs me."

"Mrs. Peabody," I began, speaking through my teeth, "your husband's been dead six months—"

"Captain Glennon," she said in a monotone, "until I've seen him have a Christian burial—"

Wow! It was too much for me, and it was too much for Haiti, right then. The long-fizzing powder keg went off. As if the widow's words, spoken like an incantation, had at last invoked the Saturnalia.

Actually there was an explosion. The evening hush was shattered by a blast of gunfire. A bugle bleated the alarm. Somewhere a guard was squalling, "Charlemagne! The Cacos! It's Charlemagne!"

My men were rushing the gun-stacks; the village set up a wild shriek of, *"Zombies! Zombies!"* and all the spooks out of hell were running in the dusk outside.

CHAPTER VII

BLOOD RAN FAST

IT WILL be a cold day before I forget that attack on Morne Noir. A mighty cold day, that's a fact. I'd seen a couple of fights over in Nicaragua, and at Belleau Wood the Heinies bothered us a little; but that Morne Noir battle beat any muss I'd been in with the Marines. It was touch and go from the first shot to the last, and some things happened in that engagement that couldn't have happened anywhere but in Haiti.

I yelled at Mrs. Peabody to lock herself in my headquarters, and I beat it out to the stockade wall to take command. Those Cacos were hitting us with everything they had, and they had plenty.

Not just bullets, or stolen hand grenades, or machete knives. But drums. Jungle horns. Rattles. Goat-bells. All the voodooistic pandemonium and blood-curdling bedlam of which those black holy-warriors were capable.

Brother, at that sort of stuff those Haitian Cacos were past-masters of the Inner Shrine. They were all daubed up with ashes, bird feathers and magician's paint; hung from head to heel with *ouangas,* dried frogs and chicken-bones.

They were made up to look like zombies, those fiends; and they gave some first class impersonations, take it from me! Pouring out of the jungle, they raced through the village and swirled around the stockade, letting out such howls as could only come from lost souls fresh out of their graves. Myself, I was half convinced that swarm had been dug out of a cemetery.

The villagers scattered in terror, and the Haitian Guard I'd been trying to organize fled in panic before that charge. *"Zombies! Zombies!"* That was one of the things that could have happened only in Haiti.

The U. S. Marines had a scrap on their hands, then. What a scrap! By the time I reached the stockade wall bullets were flying from all directions; most of the grass

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huts in the village were afire; the Cacos were storming our gate like demons.

All but one of the sentries got in in time. I felt sorry for that boy out there. A lad from Michigan. We couldn't rescue him. Luckily he was dead of a hundred bullets before those black butchers piled over him; they fell on him with their chopping knives, and when they jumped up their hands and faces were glistening red.

That sight brought my boys to their senses. You bet it did. They opened up with their Springfields and gave those Caco savages hell. I had my Colt working, and we had two old machine guns mounted near the gate ready to go. We opened fire at a hundred yards; uncorked another fusillade at fifty yards; then the machine guns were hammering aand the din was like a canning factory.

Wow! Wow! Wow! That was a carnage. We cut those tar babies down in droves. We piled them in squirming chocolate heaps. We shot the feet out from under them, dropped them kicking, riddled them to sponge. At the stockade gate we stacked them up like creosote ties.

Brother, what a battle!

The British talk about Omdurman. Huh! Five minutes of that Morne Noir assault made Omdurman a Sunday School picnic brawl in comparison.

Those Haitian wild men gave us a workout, I tell you. They weren't zombies, but they kept on coming like zombies. Knock one dead and another took his place. Springfields, Colts and machine guns didn't interest them. For weeks Charlemagne had been pumping them up to a frenzy; their voodoo priests had told them their *ouangas* made them bullet-proof, and their magic-working undertakers had promised to bring them back to life if they were killed.

When we massacred one charge, the reserves started another. They made scaling ladders of corpses and came up the stockade wall like black monkeys. One chocolate rush managed to storm and dynamite the gate.

AN ORANGE blast shook the stockade, and I saw the gate disintegrate in splinters. On the wall my boys were giving them the bayonet. Machine guns were chattering; pistols barking; knives clashing; lead flying and ricocheting everywhere. Add smoke and red flame-light from the burning village, a smell of powder like brimstone, blood and mud, shrieks from the wounded, prayers from the dying, wild oaths in American accents from Tennessee to Massachusetts, crashing explosions and the voodoo battle screams of those Caco blacks—and you have a pretty fair picture of Hades.

Whew! You don't remember much in a scrimmage like that, but I remember this much. I was on the wall when the gate blew open, and I hollered for my top sergeant to bring hand grenades and raced with him to close the breach. That old topkick had been at Manila with Dewey, and he was a darn good bomber.

The blacks were pouring through the opening when we got there, and the old man and I tossed a shower of pineapples that turned the stockade entrance into Inferno. *Crash! Crash! Crash!* I saw five howling Cacos go to pieces like so many black-red jigsaw puzzles. That stopped the crush-in for a minute, but the mob behind was gathering for another rush; and I had my teeth in a grenade pin, preparing to throw, when the sergeant grabbed my arm.

"Captain! Look out!—the woman up there! My God!"

There's another thing that could have happened only in Haiti. Mrs. Peabody! Heaven knows how she got up there, but she was up on the stockade wall by the gate.

Get a picture of her up there in the flame-glare and smoke, the splintered gate below, Caco corpses piled up like cordwood, the stockade posts smeared with strawberry jam. Standing up there on that machine-gunner's platform, the gun disabled and the gunner sprawled dead at her feet: posed up there like granite with that expression on her face—that gray statue

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of a fisherman's wife looking out to sea.

Great Jerusalem! Bullets were whining around her head like bumblebees. Black hellions were climbing the stockade not a dozen steps away; Marine bayonets were working like knitting needles; and bombs had almost blow the platform out from under her shoes. Yes, and in all that hell-scene she stood like rock. Unflinching. Calm. That figure in stone.

I don't wonder the dead Marine on the platform looked up at her with astonishment fixed in his eyes, mouth open. Hands folded on her breast, she was staring out over that screaming Caco mob and burning village as if she saw out there the shore on the other side of Jordan.

"I am waiting for my husband."

That's what she gave me when I climbed up there shouting, "Mrs. Peabody! Mrs. Peabody!" to grab her down.

You could've knocked me unconscious with a feather.

"I haven't seen him yet. But if Wilfred's out there—"

My Lord! I made to catch her around the waist and lift her down to the sergeant below; then something almost did knock me unconscious, and it wasn't feathers, either. Seeing we weren't throwing pineapples, that black mob rushed the gate. Chocolate, blue-indigo, fudge, peanut brittle, all shades of black and brown those devils stormed through.

Caught in a desperate scuffle, the sergeant was whirled away. A great blue-black Negro climbed at me, slashing with his machete. That big razor-blade took a slice from my left shoulder as thin as boloney. The pain dazed me, and it seemed I just stood there with an arm around that granite woman while the knife played a dazzle of lightning in front of my face.

It was a close shave that cannibal gave me, My, yes! His second swipe sheared the globe-and-anchor insignia off the front of my hat and took the crown clean away in front of my eyes. His third slashed the pistol holster from my hip. I'll never understand why the woman and I weren't chopped down.

Maybe that assassin caught the look on her face and paused in awe. I don't know. At any rate, my Colt finally fired and shot him four times through his watermelon lips. Even then it took him a minute to fall. Amazement formed on his Negroid features as his lower lip sagged; then blood came glugging out of his mouth; the butcher-blade fell from his loosened fingers, and with a sort of bow he stepped back off the platform.

Mrs. Peabody freed herself from my clutch to point off.

"There's a white man coming out there!"

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTAN BURIAL

AND that's what almost knocked me unconscious. Not the blow from that chopper. Not the wild charge that followed, storming into the stockade like a cyclone. No, a white man *was* coming! A white man on a donkey! Pounding down the trail where it wound out of the night-hung jungle. Into the crimson fire-glare of the village. Through that holocaust of blazing hovels and straight for the stockade gate—a white man, or I'm a liar!

And how he came! Low in saddle over that donkey as if he were riding a motorcycle. Whooping at the top of his lungs. Aiming his rifle one-handed, the butt braced in the crotch of his arm, firing at everything in front of him. Yow! In the dust, smoke and fireworks I couldn't make out who it was; he was holding with his left hand some object up in front of his face for protection—something that looked like an old chunk of wood.

But whoever he was, he was a madman. Like a one-man cavalry charge, he slam-banged into that melee before the gate, and the Cacos squalled like tigers with a morsel in their midst. That white man's sun helmet was shot away; the donkey reared and stumbled under him; the blacks closed in, and I expected to see him hacked into a thousand fragments. But he wasn't.

No; through the dust-swirl I could see

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him flaying at the blacks, one-handedly swinging his rifle—beating up that crowd into a screeching thresh. Still holding that brown thing up in front of his face as a priest holds a cross, he waded into that mob like a threshing-machine. What? Well, those Cacos were tumbling around like chaff. Jumping away. Screaming in fear, and running.

Running, I tell you. Dropping their guns and butcher-knives and legging it for the jungle pellmell. Howls of terror reached the black ears of those in the stockade, and they dashed to the entrance to see what it was. That gave my boys a chance to reload, and they gave the retreating fiends a blast in the sit-down.

That wasn't what kicked them out, though. What sent them flying was that white man in the gateway, roaring curses at them with that queer object shielding his face. It might've been a magic charm, a courage-melter, the sort of wizardish hoodoo that sends goblins back to their graves.

Anyway, it did something to those Cacos. There was a hundred-tongued squall of fear, and the next thing I knew the whole mob was bolting, panic-stricken.

Well, it's generally the other way around—it isn't usually the Marines who are rescued and send up the cheer. This time it was our turn. When the dust and din cleared away there wasn't a live Caco in sight to be shot at, and the Leathernecks in the stockade looked down and yelled themselves hoarse.

That was a wonderful rescue act. Just in the nick of time. The hero who'd pulled it off didn't realize it was over, either. Down there in the smoke-fogged gateway he was still swinging his rifle and capering with that thing held up in front of him, bellowing at nothing.

"Come on, ye dirty scuts! Blacklegs! Assassins! Try to get the white woman, will ya! Just try to get her from me!"

"Terrence McCoy!"

I'D FORGOTTEN the woman on the platform beside me. Her cry broke through the cheering; brought that wild man in the gateway to his senses. He looked up, thrust behind him the brown object he'd been holding, and yelled, "Sure, an' it's me, Jenny Lou!" His face was sweat-smeared, twisted out of shape, white as chalk; it took me a minute to recognize the big Irishman.

He tried to grin, climbing up to the platform where we stood, but he looked pretty cooked. Down in the stockade my top sergeant was gathering a bomb squad to clear the village outskirts of chance snipers; I snapped the order for pursuit, and while the boys chased out through the gate, we stood on that machine-gun platform staring at each other.

"Terry!" The woman's eyes filled with tears. She started to say something and broke off.

He said huskily, "You didn't think I'd left you, did you, Jenny? Me—th' McCoy?"

She said in a whispery voice, "It was brave of you to come back, Terry. You saved us."

He shook his head. "It was Wilfred who saved us, Jenny Lou."

"Wilfred!"

I couldn't tell you how she stared at that Irishman, or how he was looking at her. I know I was doing some first-class oggling on my own behalf. Perhaps you can imagine us up on that stockade wall: the village fires dying and the jungle-shadows closing in; faint shouts, cries, explosions drifting back in the night, and the scenery littered with the shambles of that incredible battle.

"It was Wilfred I was after when I hiked out of camp," McCoy was saying hoarsely. "Y'see, I went up in the mountains to try an' find him. Six months is a long time gone, but I thought maybe the Cacos—well—had kept it. Or maybe some Haitian peasant up there would know what had happened to the body. Anyhow, I couldn't stand you eatin' your heart out like you'd been. I thought I'd try."

She waited, wordless, as the man's voice stalled. His eyes roamed off to the distant silhouette of mountains. He said thickly,

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"I had a hunch, Jenny; I don't know why. That cave up there, where he'd found that little Arawak mummy. Maybe there'd be some clue. Anyway, I went there." He paused to pull a breath. "Jenny—I found him."

"You—you brought him back?"

McCoy couldn't look at her. His eyes were here, there, everywhere. All this time he'd been standing with that something held behind him; now he coughed and shifted his feet, and on his forehead came a shine of sweat. My hair went up, frozen. McCoy's lips were moving, but his voice didn't seem to want to come.

He whispered, "Yes, Jenny Lou, I brought him back." Then the words came in a blurt, "It wasn't the Cacos that took him outa that lake; it was the Arawaks. Holy Mother! The Arawaks he'd been lookin' for—they'd found *him*. An' they'd took his body up there to that secret cave, an'— But it's that what scared those murderin' Cacos."

JUDAS! It had panicked those superstitious black men, and I tell you, it all but paralyzed me. McCoy brought it out from behind him, and my insides turned to ice. It wasn't any chunk of wood, mister. It was one of those shriveled little mummies, brown and leathery—twin brother to the one Wilfred Peabody had fetched into camp on that night so long ago.

Only it wasn't exactly a twin. That other had Indian features and the look of something centuries old. This one was newer, fresher looking, not so worn around the edges. And it didn't have Indian features. No, it had yellowish hair. A dome-shaped little head. Dried-up ears that stuck out like bat-wings. A studious look on its pinched-up, little dead face.

Yes, it looked like a little dead gnome. A little dead gnome no bigger than a doll, with a spindly frame and a head too large for the body and raisin-like eyes all squinted up from too much study. I didn't have to look twice to see it was Wilfred Peabody. Cured and mummified and shrunk by some gosh-awful embalming process. Like one of those pictures in the dictionary: *Wilfred Peabody, reduced to one-tenth natural size.*

McCoy whispered, "I found him up there in that cave where he found the first one."

All the granite went out of Jenny Lou, like gray rock melting; I saw her start to slump, and I caught her before she could fall.

Later that night—with the stockade cleaned up and the jungle quiet—we went out on burial detail. First there were six Marines to sleep beneath the Stars and Stripes. Then farther off, under a big cottonwood tree, there was that pathetic little grave, hardly deeper than four shovelfuls.

We waited until the Marines retired, then walked out under the moon, just the three of us—Mrs. Peabody, McCoy and I —Mrs. Peabody carrying the little wooden box. Jenny Lou had long since gone beyond tears. She knelt by, silently praying, while I mumbled the funeral service and McCoy made four scoops with the shovel.

When it was done, the relief was terrific. The woman's face was calm, and a weight of tons seemed released from the Irishman's shoulders. He mopped his forehead with a wrist, and put aside the shovel, and turned to the woman, simply.

"You'll let me look after you? As he—would have wanted? You'll come home with me now, Jenny Lou?"

"Yes, Terry," she said softly. "I haven't been fair to you, either. If you want me—as soon as we can leave Morne Noir—I'll marry you."

Looking back, I saw them standing over that sad little grave. Hand in hand. I walked back into the stockade, and up in the black mountains the voodoo drums were pounding. But the Cacos had been beaten, and the thing was over. Wilfred Peabody had had a Christian burial.

CHAPTER IX

LAST BAPTISM

SO THEY were married, and everyone lived happily ever after? Well, I'll tell you about the wedding. No story is com-

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plete without a wedding, it seems, and to finish this one off right I'll have to tell you about this one.

But first, we weren't able to get out of Morne Noir for some weeks yet. Charlemagne was wild about that Caco defeat, and he harried the district with snipers and sent bullets into the stockade every chance. But the atmosphere was better around Morne Noir. You know, it was. As it turned out afterward, the back of the Caco revolt had been broken by that battle—if the records don't give my outfit the credit for it, it's maybe because we didn't deserve the credit—anyway, that zombie scare was over. The Great White Doctor's return, coming back as he did, turned the trick.

Then Charlemagne was nipped off by an informer. That ended the war. As a chapter in the history of the U. S. Marines that one is a zim-blinger and worth recounting. A reward was put up for the Caco leader, and for twenty-five hundred bucks a Haitian turncoat offered to lead a Marine squad to the bandit's secret camp.

A Marine captain and six men disguised themselves with rags and burnt cork to look like Negroes, and sneaked through the enemy line at night and shot Charlemagne. It happened not far from Cap-Haitien, and if you think it didn't take nerve, tell it to the Marines. Where but Haiti could a thing like that have happened?

And now the wedding. As usual, with the war having petered out, a detachment arrived to relieve Morne Noir. We were bloody glad to get out of there, and nobody could have been gladder than Jenny Louise Peabody and big Terrence McCoy.

Plans were set for the church in Cape Haiti—somewhat reluctantly I'd consented to be best man and make the arrangements. The story got there ahead of us, and what with the revolt being broken and all, things were making for quite a shebang. The boys in my outfit were the only ones invited, but half the town seemed on hand, and we had a time keeping them out of the church. There was a plenty of flags and flowers and rum. Out in the street the Negroes were staging a carnival *bamboche*.

Because a boat was leaving for the States at midnight and there wasn't time to wait over, McCoy and I wangled the priest's consent for the ceremony at ten P.M. Rain was falling, but it didn't douse the celebration in the street—only muffled the dance-drums a little—and in the church the candles were right pretty.

So was Jenny Louise coming down the aisle in some Haitian lace she'd got somewhere, the old top sergeant escorting her and trying not to look as plastered as he was; and so was McCoy, if I may say so, all duked up in a clean white suit, rose in buttonhole, chin out handsome. He got a big hand from the Leathernecks in the pews until I snapped an order to remind them in church there wasn't any cheering.

I'd been afraid of trouble because of all the rum, but it went off well. The ceremony was as usual; then I snapped the boys in line along either side of the aisle, smart, with a canopy of crossed bayonets—a little honor gag I'd figured would please the married couple.

It was mighty impressive in the church, all candlelight and shadows, the arch of bayonets shining. But just as the newlyweds turned from the altar to start up the aisle there was a hitch at the church door.

I heard a stifled oath from the door guard. Scuffling. Outside there was some kind of hullabaloo; I thought a fight had started among the street dancers. Then the door blew wide open on a gust of rain that shook the candles, and the guard who'd been trying to hold it was down. Plop! Out cold as a glass eye.

I gasped, "Damnation!" then almost went out cold myself.

A FIGURE was standing on the threshhold: a pale, water-drizzled, shadowy figure that might've been a conjuration from the night and rain. In the dark behind it, the Haitian crowd was wailing like Judgment Day. It started down the aisle, slow as a sleep-walker, advancing toward the altar with eyes like sockets full of witch shine. Nobody moved to stop it. That military wedding had frozen into waxworks.

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Down the aisle through the arbor of bayonets that figure came. Rags dripping. Wet boots squeaking. Slow as menace. When it pulled up at last before the newlyweds, every other figure in church, except the priest, had solidified into an image like the saints on the walls.

I don't wonder that Haitian cleric went down on his knees in a jumble of robes and Latin prayers. Outside, the black mob was screeching, rioting. *"Zombie! Zombie!"*

That figure puddling the carpet before us looked like it, too. Clothes in muddy tatters. Hatless. Rickety frame whittled down to skin and bones. Starved shoulders barely able to support the domish head on which the skin had tightened and the flesh had waned, making caverns of the eyes and cones of the cheeks while the cheekbones stood out skull-like and the ears jutted like transparent winter leaves.

Lordy! The eyes looked at us through a streaming veil of long, yellow hair. Water dribbling down through the rags made a mud-puddle. In the candlelight it was terrible. Worse than that:

It was Wilfred Peabody! If I ever saw a man who looked as if he'd been resurrected by ghouls from the grave—

As if that weren't bad enough, he pointed a hooky, crooked finger at his former wife, Jenny Lou. He spoke; and if I live to be a million, I'll never forget that skullish croak.

"Murderer!"

Like that. And once again, dropping that word in the tomb-silence, baleful as all condemnation.

"Murderer! You thought you could get me out of the way, did you, Jenny Lou? So you could marry this handsome Irishman? But I've come back, Jenny—the husband who loved you—to claim my lawful rights and see there's justice done."

I couldn't hope to describe the way he said that. Chin on chest. Accusing finger pointed. I couldn't hope to describe the hush of horror in that church; the way we stood locked in appallment; Jenny Lou's face, aghast.

"Wilfred— Wilfred— You're not dead?"

"I wish I could die," he groaned. "I wish I could die. To come back and find you like this—to have to accuse the wife I loved—of trying to murder me!"

"Trying to murder you?" The woman's eyes were stark wide. "I?"

"Oh, don't deny it," he moved his head heavily from side to side. "Don't deny it, Jenny. I knew you were crazy about Terrence, but I never thought you'd do a thing like that. Then that day up there in the mountains—

"Your shots hit me, all right—killed my donkey. But they didn't kill me. That Arawak mummy I was carrying under my coat—those bullets hit that mummy. Knocked me out of the saddle, but the mummy cushioned the shock—bullets didn't penetrate my chest. You see I didn't die—"

"Wilfred!" the woman's voice scaled up to a cry. *"How?"*

"I DIDN'T die," the skullish voice intoned. "I fell from the donkey and rolled into the bushes. Off the path. Down that terrible slope. But I didn't go over the edge. I hung on. I couldn't crawl back up to the path; I couldn't defend myself, for I had no weapon. I knew you meant to kill me, then. So I crawled along the cliff-edge, through the bushes — crawled away.

"After a while the wounds hurt and I lay down. Clung there in the underbrush. I could hear you firing, but you didn't come after me. Then I lay unconscious for hours; I don't know how many. Next day an old Negress found me; carried me on a mule to her mountain hut way up near the Santo Domingan border where the Arawaks are—"

"Oh, my God!" Jenny Lou swayed, face in hands.

"I had fever." Her first husband's voice sank to an apparitional whisper. "I wanted to die. But she kept me up there—took care of me—for months. Just an ancient Negress —old and wrinkled—black—couldn't read or write—you wouldn't have called her civilized. But she was kind, gentle—even

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if she did pray to Voodoo gods to save me —more heart than any white woman I've ever known."

His whisper harshened. "She wouldn't have tried to murder me. She wouldn't have shot a man—*her* man—for another—"

"But I didn't!" Jenny Lou tore aside her bridal veil with the cry. "I loved you, Wilfred! Loved you! Oh, I know I did a dreadful thing. You were always so preoccupied with your work — your research — I was jealous. I thought you'd lost interest in me. So I pretended to be interested in Terrence. Poor Terrence!

"It was silly of me. Terrible! Just a foolish woman's sham. But I thought to make you jealous, thought you'd pay me more attention. Then that night when you told me how you'd been working, saving, all for me—I was sorry, wanted to tell you. But the very next morning you were gone. Oh, Wilfred!" She faced him, agonized. "How can you believe I tried to kill you?"

The twist on his ravaged face, then, was soul-curdling. He swept the wet hair away from his eyes to glare. His bony finger pointed.

"Because I saw you! You know I did! I heard your horse coming—turned in my saddle just as you rode around that big boulder behind me. Maybe it was dark and raining; maybe I'm near-sighted—your gun was firing, too. But you had it pulled up to hide your face—I saw your white rubber cape. *You were wearing that white rain-cape I gave you last Christmas!*"

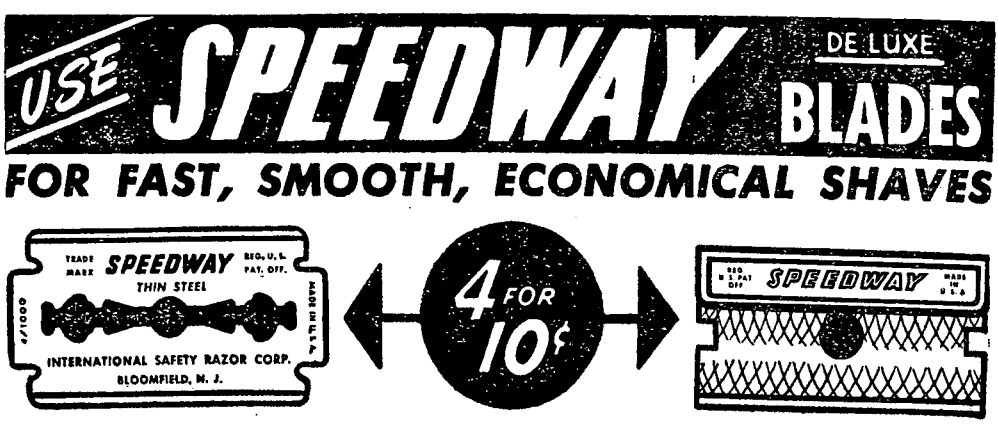
BANG! What an accusation that was. Like a silent bombshell; a bright explosion of mercury in my paralyzed brain. Outside the Haitian crowd was rioting, but inside that church you could hear the candle-beads drop. Nobody moved. Nobody seemed to breathe. And in that shatterpating moment I saw it all.

Little Peabody riding absent-mindedly along that mountain trail. Murder on hoofbeats shadowing up through gray mist behind him. That startled turn in saddle. Near-sighted eyes, glasses bleared by rain. Blinding gunfire; shock throwing him from his donkey; rolling head over heels, stunned, downslope to the edge of that abyss.

Then the murderer's gun keeps going—I'm across the valley—for me to hear. It must look like a Caco ambush, appear as one of Charlemagne's jobs. The assassin rigs up a scene of bloody battle; kills the horse as well as the donkey; sprawls down in the muddy path; shoots himself deliberately in the leg and hand; fires random shots and a couple of bullets down the valley in my direction for good measure.

When I get there the stage is set convincingly. But Peabody is alive, concealed by the bushes, crawling off stunned through the underbrush of that overhang. And he'd glimpsed the white rain-cape the killer wore as a masking hood—Jenny Lou's cape, which she'd loaned, on that rainy morning when we set out after Peabody, to McCoy.

I saw all that, and Jenny Lou saw it.



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McCoy saw that we saw it, too.

That handsome Irish taxidermist! Wilfred Peabody's life-long friend! He'd been wearing Jenny Lou's white rain-cape when we set out to find the little Arawak-hunting scientist and bring him back to Morne Noir. He was the one who'd fired those murderous bullets from behind.

To kill Peabody and get his wife? Making certain that Jenny Lou, widowed, would come into a large bank account and ten thousand dollars insurance? Convinced that he, Terry, could marry himself into Wilfred Peabody's money? But McCoy must've had that in mind when we went out after Peabody that dark day. With murder in his heart and bullets in his gun he'd trailed his best friend, sent me off on a detour when we were getting close, and staged that ambush stunt.

There was murder in his heart again as he stood there, exposed, at the foot of the altar. In the light of the church candles his eyes were balls of yellow fire. All the handsomeness went out of him at a rush. He gave one wolf-like howl—the howl of the assassin caught red-handed just as his fingers closed on the prize money. Whirling, he snatched up a silver candelabrum; hurled the sacred candles at Peabody's head.

Talk about the return of Enoch Arden! In a flare of crashing constellations the little scientist went down. I'm glad I had one good sock at Terrence McCoy. Lashing out without time to aim, I nailed that wife-stealer a bash in the nose that sent him plunging over backward into the holy water.

He needed that baptism; it was going to be the last he'd ever get. Caroming off the stone fount in a shower, he went leaping and screaming over the pews, filling the church with a horde of wild oaths, knocking down a pile of prayer books, clawing his way through a shrine.

His last defilement was to smash Saint Christopher the Protector. Pictured in stained glass, the good saint went to smithereens as that black Irishman went shattering out through the window.

He got away. By the time the Marines could pull themselves together and rush outside he was gone. In the devil's hurly-burly of the street, the flittergibbet of lights and rain, the uproar of zombie-panicked natives, Haitian police, yells and thumping dance-drums, he vanished in the night. Cape Haiti with its crooked streets and hovels, its maze of dark alleys and smells was a haven for such a guy. A rat can always find a hole.

Five days afterward he was seen by a peasant, heading inland for the Santo Domingan border. I guess he figured the States might be too hot for him and he'd better lie under cover for a while.

Anyway, at the time there was only that boat he had reserved for his honeymoon. We went out there that night to make sure he wasn't aboard. Then our Marine patrols combed the town until long after midnight before they gave him up as a bad job.

I went back to the church to find Peabody.

That blow on the head had given him an ugly gash, but Jenny Louise was looking after him. They sat together in a quiet pew while she bathed his face. Off in the vestry the poor priest, dazed, was taking care of papers to revoke the wedding and restore Mrs. Peabody to her lawful status as Wilfred Peabody's wife.

The little professor was begging Jenny Louise to forgive him.

"To think that I could have mistrusted you so."

"But it was my fault." She was hugging him close. "I loved you so, I wanted to make you mistrust me!"

And she'd married that McCoy cur because she hadn't wanted to hurt a friend of Wilfred's. Lord!

I tiptoed out. Across the night-hung town the sounds of rioting voodoo-drums and yelling Marine patrols were breaking the peace and quiet. The peace and quiet of an island that hasn't had any since Columbus waded ashore, there, with civilization in 1492.

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EPILOGUE

GLENNON finished his story and a bottle of Scotch at the same time, and leaned back in his chair, wiping his lips, throat, cheeks, forehead. We were cruising in under the shadow of a mountainous headland, and, the wind cut off, the air was a dead weight flavored with custard, muggy.

Clouds and pale, soundless lightning drifted around the mountaintops; in lavender twilight, bay and headland were two shades of purple. Listening, I thought I could hear drums. It may have been my imagination. Real or imaginary, the sound came in through the porthole and joined something in the smokerooom atmosphere I didn't like.

"Glennon," I said—and I know *my* voice was husky—"that was a devil of a yarn!"

The ex-Marine captain grunted. "If anyone told it to me I wouldn't believe it, so I don't expect you to."

He didn't understand my expression. "What I don't see," I explained, "is how Peabody came back a second time. I mean, if McCoy's shots didn't kill him—just wounded him slightly, and he was up there in the mountains all the time, not dead at all—well, where did his mummy come from? The shrunken little mummy of Peabody that McCoy found and brought back from that mountain cave?"

Glennon shook his head, somber-eyed. "To begin with, he didn't find that mummy up in that cave. He took it up there with him, see? McCoy had been stalemated. Here he'd gone and killed Peabody—or thought he had—so's he could get Jenny Lou and her money. Then instead of falling into his arms at word of her husband's death, the way McCoy'd expected, Jenny didn't give him any time.

"Huh! She turned into stone and refused to budge out of Morne Noir, insisting her husband might come back as a zombie. That must've got on McCoy's nerves plenty. Her carrying on, declaring she wouldn't move till she'd seen her husband's body have a Christian burial."

Glennon interjected an oath. "No wonder McCoy was anxious to find the body. Can you imagine his feelings when he went up to that lake to get it and it wasn't there? He was stymied. Scared, too, I'll bet. Murder-guilt on his soul and Haiti full of spooks, he must've been on tenterhooks to get out of there. He had to put an end to that zombie talk and take Jenny Lou out of Morne Noir. With Peabody missing completely, he was stuck. So he made that mummy—"

"Made a mummy!" I gasped.

Glennon nodded, grim. "That Irishman was a clever scoundrel. What's more, he was a taxidermist—knew how to stuff animal skins and preserve hair. Remember Peabody calling him a greater artist than Akeley? He was an artist, all right. A genius. Well, he had his tools there in camp and a lot of scraps around to work with—bits of animal skin, tanned leather, stuffing and whatnot. Probably cut off and bleached some of his own hair for the wig. What he really made was a dummy, not a mummy."

"George!" I gulped. "And pretended to go out and find it so he could bring it back to Mrs. Peabody to convince her her husband was dead!"

"And she could give him a Christian burial," Glennon said. "Can you beat that for brutal deviltry? That Irishman was a rattlesnake. I'm convinced he didn't give a whoop for Jenny Lou, either. Not until he heard Peabody tell the woman he had twenty thousand for her in the bank and ten thousand worth of insurance. It was the day after that when McCoy tried to knock Peabody off. All McCoy was after was that money.

"Why even when McCoy pulled that rescue act, coming back to the stockade and fighting the way he did, he wasn't rescuing Jenny Lou; he was rescuing his chance to marry a widow worth thirty thousand dollars. A handsome guy, yes. Lots of chest, lots of jaw, lots of fine black hair and twinkling blue eye and blarney charm. But give him a chance at a woman with thirty thou!"

He gestured violently.

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THE ex-Marine captain looked off through the porthole and swore. We were close to the headland now. Purple jungle slid by as we moved on a bay of indigo glass. There was a hot-house smell, like orchids and warm manure.

Glennon drew a breath and murmured, "Haiti!" He rounded in his chair. "Remember what I said at the start: you never get to know Haiti as well as Haiti gets to know you? Well—it got to know Terrence McCoy."

I stared and could feel perspiration wetting my forehead as Glennon, speaking, reached for that shoebox in front of him. I'd forgotten about that little box and its contents while he'd been telling his story.

"It got the low-down on that Irish taxidermist." Glennon paused, one hand on the box-lid. "You never can tell about Haiti. There's things go on in those mountains out there a white man wouldn't believe.

"Take those Arawak Indians, now. Me, I wouldn't've believed they existed. But this summer I had to come down here on an insurance investigation—to show you how funny things are. After I retired from the Marines I had to do some thing so I signed up with this insurance company.

"Because I knew Haiti, they sent me down here on this case—planter died of fever, that was all, but the Haitian officials got all balled up with the idemnity. Anyway, I settled the business over in Port au Prince, and then just for old times sake I thought I'd travel across the island and pay a visit to Morne Noir."

Glennon stood up out of his chair and leaned, a little unsteadily, over the shoe box.

"Listen, mister! I was passing through a shabby mountain village—place hasn't even got a name—when I saw a little voodoo doctor's hut, and this thing hanging in the door. By heaven!"

Lifting the lid, Glennon glared down at the contents of the box—that frowsty, tobacco-colored bogle which looked like a worn-out leather doll. Glennon pointed a shaky finger.

"See the black hair? That pugged up little face? Mister, the last time I heard of that Irishman was fifteen years ago when he was big as life and on his way inland to the Santo Domingan border. This is no doll, my friend. This is no imitation. That place where it's come unsewed"—he pointed—"that sawdust is spilling out of an appendicitis scar."

I couldn't speak, looking down.

Glennon closed the lid and looked up at me. Moisture beads shone on his temples.

"You can't fool Haiti," he said softly. He tapped the little mummy-box with his finger. "This is th' real McCoy."

THE END

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own control of the largest circulating newspaper in my County and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 139, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 139, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinso:.

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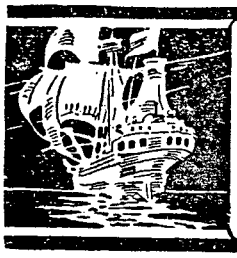

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

MAYBE you thought we had been stuffing the ballot box in defense of ARGOSY'S new cover. But we haven't been doing that; we have simply printed the comments as they came in. Today we have on hand a letter from the opposition, and we hasten to present it, strong in our belief in the democratic system. The minority must not be stifled in this department.

CARL GROSSWILER

It has usually been my custom to add a short word with my renewals about my views of the stories in ARGOSY. I do not recall them at the moment now, and lack the time to check over copies, but I, among others do remember "The Harp and the Blade", and from the way it ended, I hope to see a sequel sometime; it would be too bad just to drop Finnian for good—the way he wound up.

There were others, serials, novelets and shorts that were good, and of course some not.

I was among those annoyed when the pages dropped from 144 to 128 and then to 112, and was contemplating ending my subscription. Have decided to stay with you a while yet.

Frankly I don't care for the new type of cover to any great extent; after all, it's just the same thing. The ship is all right, but why not a small illustration in the panel below? Pictures, the more the better, always dress up a story, or magazine, and add appeal to many who judge a book or yarn's possible interest by the pictures.

Good as some of the stories are, if all illustrations were dropped, I think I'd drop from the subscriber's list. They help you form an opinion of the locale, or characters, action, etc. And I imagine would help sell the magazine on the stands too. Some might buy it now because of the new get-up, but others, still strangers to it, noting the same cover and no illustrations, week after week, would hardly be enticed, whereas some interesting illustration might stand a chance of inducing them to buy.

And contrary to some who have commented, I hardly feel that all covers were melodramatic, bloodthirsty, gory, etc., so that the magazine had to be smuggled home under one's coat. Too, this is supposed to be a sort of red-blooded man's world (I hope) more or less, and one should be admired for reading something with zest and zing to it, instead of, er, ah, how could I express it?—a book of limpid poetry, or what-not?

Oh, well, mine is just one man's opinion, not carrying a great deal of weight. Have missed novels by Burroughs, Luke Short, Bennett Foster for some time. Also a good western by Brand. The Kildare series is out of my line. Anything historical, Western, South Seas, China, etc., as well as the Goldsmith air yarns, is my meat. The more the merrier. And now, until next renewal time, *Adios.*

HILLSBORO, MO.

PLEASANT to hear from Mr. Grosswiler, and his remarks about the cover are interesting. Right now he should be fairly satisfied with what he finds inside the magazine because there's the Goldsmith serial, and a new Western by Bennett Foster begins next week.

You'd think the editors could remember, at once, any ARGOSY story mentioned. Well—editors change, memories slip.

Now here's a request for information. If any of you can identify the story mentioned below, please let us know and we'll get in touch with

LOUIS WARD

About six years ago ARGOSY published a serial based on the fact that a sailor had fallen and disappeared from a ship while members of the crew were witnessing the mirage of a strange city. Special notation of this was made in the magazine at the time and I am anxious to obtain the name and author of the story.

Thanking you for any help you can offer.

STATEN ISLAND, N. Y.

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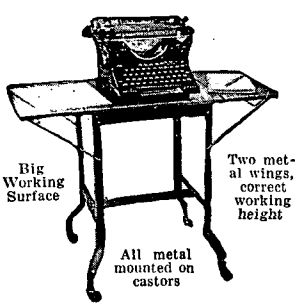

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LOSE A POUND A DAY

without starvation diets, drugs or exercises

Noted Weight Control Authority Proves You Can Eat Your Way to Slimness on 3 Square Meals a Day

Here's Proof You Can Reduce

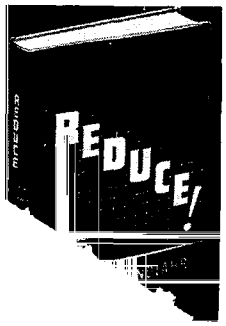
10 POUNDS IN 10 DAYS!

Here are typical "success stories" showing before - and - after records of men and women who tried Victor H. Lindlahr's celebrated "Eat and Reduce" plan:

Name	DAYS ON DIET	WEIGHT BEFORE	WEIGHT AFTER	NET LOSS
W. H., Brooklyn, N. Y.	10	185	175	10
A. S., Union City, N. J.	10	192	182	10
Mrs. H. McL., Laurel Springs, N.J.	10	160	147	13
L. R. P., Bronx, N. Y.	10	155	145	10
Mrs. M. B., Ridgewood, N. J.	10	185	174	11
Mrs. H. F., Glen Cove, L. I.	10	136	126	10
Mrs. L. A. T., Vineland, N. J.	10	162	152	10
A. B., New York City	10	182	172	10
F. W., Jersey City, N. J.	10	177	167	10
T. J. P., Newark, N. J.	10	205	192	13
Mrs. F. P., Newark, N. J.	10	190	180	10
A. N. J., Morton, Pa.	10	192	184	12
Mrs. B. L. G., Newark, N. J.	10	136	125	11
Mr. L., New York City	10	187	176	11
Mrs. M. U., East Orange, N. J.	10	240	230	10
Mrs. B. S., Whitestone, L. I.	10	155	145	10
E. H. K., Howard Beach, L. I.	10	154	144	10
Mrs. L. L., Bogota, N. J.	10	184	174	10

The Lindlahr Reducing System can help you, too.
Results usually begin to show in 48 hours!

FREE! 10 DAYS' PROOF!



Lose weight or pay nothing! Get a copy of "EAT AND REDUCE!" at your bookstore. Or mail the coupon right now. Unless the Lindlahr system does as much for you as for thousands of others, unless you are thoroughly convinced that you, too, can lose an average of 10 POUNDS IN 10 DAYS, simply return the book and the 10-day test will cost you nothing. You have nothing to lose by this offer but pounds of unwanted fat. Why not take advantage of it . . . NOW?

Just think of it! Without the slightest trouble or strain on your will-power, you can comfortably lose as many as 10 pounds in 10 days, 20 pounds in 20 days, 30 pounds in 30 days! You can do this without starvation dieting, fasting, exercising or drugs — but by enjoying THREE SQUARE MEALS A DAY *of the right kinds of foods.*

VICTOR H. LINDLAHR

In countless cases, Victor H. Lindlahr has shown that proper reducing is not a question of "cutting meals in half" but of eating full, satisfying meals of the correct LOW-CARBOHYDRATE foods which naturally "burn up" fat. At the same time, these foods give you an unbelievably rich supply of health-giving minerals and vitamins.

Keep On Eating Foods You Like

When you start to use the Lindlahr system of corrective eating, you simply continue to eat practically the same foods you now enjoy including meats, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, vegetables, fruits and other healthful foods. The only difference is that you eat these foods in different tasty combinations that REDUCE your weight, instead of increasing fat.

This highly effective system of weight reduction has helped thousands of men and women to lose from 25 to 75 pounds . . . safely, easily, quickly. It is plainly, clearly explained in EAT AND REDUCE, by Victor H. Lindlahr, President of the National Nutrition Society and famous authority on weight control through corrective eating.

Don't Risk a Penny!

So sure are we that your first 10 days on the Lindlahr Reducing Plan will show amazing results to you, that we invite you to try it at our risk. Read the offer alongside the coupon. Then send immediately for your copy of EAT AND REDUCE!

LOSE WEIGHT—OR PAY NOTHING

PRENTICE-HALL, Inc.
Dept. EB-30, 70 Fifth Ave., N. Y. C.

Please send me a copy of EAT AND REDUCE! I enclose $2.50, in full payment, with this understanding: If, after 10 days trial of Victor H. Lindlahr's eat-and-reduce system I do not actually lose weight as promised, I may return the book and you will refund my money.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... STATE.....

☐ Check here if you prefer C. O. D. shipment, in which case you pay few cents extra for postage and charges. SAME MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE!

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